

By Appointment Only

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/40423323) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/40423323>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationship:	Remus Lupin/James Potter
Characters:	Remus Lupin , James Potter , Sirius Black , Lyall Lupin , Lily Evans Potter , Kingsley Shacklebolt , Original Characters
Additional Tags:	Omega Verse , Alpha/Alpha , Alpha James Potter , Alpha Remus Lupin , Remus Lupin Never Went to Hogwarts , Alternate Universe - Different First Meeting , Alternate Universe - No Voldemort , Werewolf Discrimination , Past Relationship(s) , Angst , Loneliness , Self-Esteem Issues , Miscommunication , Strangers to Lovers , Getting Together , First Kiss , First Time , Frottage , Mating Bites , Mating Bond , Period Typical Attitudes , Abuse of Authority , Injury , Bad Parenting , Past Character Death , Masturbation , Anal Sex , Mating Cycles/In Heat , Blow Jobs , Scent Kink , Knotting
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of By Appointment Only
Collections:	The Fic That Haunts You
Stats:	Published: 2022-07-19 Completed: 2023-11-30 Words: 108,590 Chapters: 21/21

By Appointment Only

by [puuvillaa](#)

Summary

All alphas must be mated by the age of thirty. If an alpha isn't mated by then, they will have to be appointed a mate by the Alpha Mating Registry.

Remus and James meet at the Registry.

Notes

I might regret posting this fic already because I might run out of chapters to post, but I've been sitting on it for a year now, so I think it's about time. I have a good chunk of it written, so weekly updates (unless I forget) until I either reach the end or run out of finished chapters.

More tags will be added later.

This chapter contains a small mention of suicide.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dear Mr Lupin,

It has come to our attention that you do not currently have a registered mate. As you are aware, the Alpha Mating Law requires all alphas to have a registered mate by the age of 30 to reduce the risk of Alpha Outbreak, a condition that turns an unmated alpha uncontrollably violent. The risk significantly increases with age. Studies have shown that mated alphas are immune to Alpha Outbreak. Please, see the enclosed pamphlet for more information.

Please, contact us within the next week to set up an appointment to discuss your options. If you are currently in a relationship but have not registered it, you can do so during the appointment. If you do not have a mate, we will discuss the process of appointing you a mate.

Happy 29th birthday,

Yours sincerely,

Edith Wilkins

Alpha Mating Registry

Ministry of Magic

Remus had known that eventually, the Alpha Mating Registry would contact him. He had known, yet he had preferred not to think about it. He had preferred pretending that it wouldn't happen to him. He had even preferred the terrifying idea that he might not live long enough to receive any communication from the Registry.

He had known, yet he was surprised when he received the official-looking letter early in the morning of his 29th birthday.

He looked out the window. The weather was wet and grey.

Happy fucking birthday to him.

They were going to ask about the lycanthropy, weren't they? And then he was going to have to listen to them waffle on as they tried to decide what to do with him. Surely, they wouldn't assign a mate to a werewolf. But what else could they do? Leave him unmated and even more of a potential danger to society?

What would happen to him? They couldn't let him go back home. They might want to keep him under observation. Could they arrest him? Was it a crime not to be mate material? Would he turn into an example case that the Registry officials would later refer to when they encountered a lycanthrope?

How did other werewolves do it, Remus wondered. There must have been other alpha werewolves—he couldn't possibly be the only one—so how had they gone about mating?

Maybe they weren't as bitter and lonely as him.

Maybe so, but how could they have found mates who didn't mind being bound to a werewolf? Were there people like that?

And were there volunteers like that?

There had to be.

The Ministry had to know that such an issue could arise, and they must have made sure that there were potential mates for werewolves. The letter hadn't mentioned his lycanthropy, but they must have known because he was registered. Maybe that was why they had contacted him so early.

Not that he knew when they usually contacted unmated alphas.

In fact, it would make sense for them to send out a letter on an alpha's 29th birthday. Remus didn't know how long the process of being assigned a mate took, but he couldn't imagine it being fast.

It might be fast for him. They might tell him he was unmateable and therefore needed to be put down.

Unlikely.

Feeling on edge, Remus wrote to the Ministry to set up an appointment and spent the rest of his birthday in mild anxiety.

He wasn't good with people.

Well, it wasn't entirely true. But true enough. He had spent so much of his life alone that he didn't think he would know how to form a genuine connection with someone, especially if that connection was meant to lead to mating—and to living together.

Was it possible for mates not to live together? Could they keep their own homes and only occasionally get together to renew their bond?

He had read little about Alpha Outbreak, but he was relatively certain that they wouldn't be allowed to break their bond unless he had a new mate waiting for a bonding. He would be tied to someone for the rest of his life.

More importantly, that someone would be tied to him.

And what if he bonded with an alpha? What would happen when he died? He was going to die younger than the average wizard; would his mate need a new mate to bond with? He didn't know.

And that wasn't the real issue. The real issue was that he was a werewolf, and he was going to be forcing someone to bond with him. To—up to a point—depend on him.

Was it completely immoral?

Should he just... not go to the Ministry at all? Disappear off the face of the earth? If he wasn't anywhere to be found, would it really be so bad if he did have an Outbreak? Who would he be able to destroy other than himself?

He was used to carrying in him the potential for uncontrollable violence. He knew how it felt to lose control, and he knew how it felt when that aggression turned on him. He knew what it was like to wake up in the morning, to not remember exactly what had happened, and to find himself torn to shreds.

His dark mood followed him all the way to his first appointment at the Ministry a couple of weeks later. He had been sleeping poorly, and he was still sore from the full moon, even though it had been five days earlier, and he knew it was obvious in the way he carried himself. It was good. It disguised the vastness of the dread he was feeling.

He walked into the Atrium, clumsily attaching his visitor's badge (*Remus Lupin, Mating*) to the front of his robes, hoping that no one could read what it said from a distance. The man registering his wand looked utterly bored, and he must not have realised what Remus was because Remus was sure he wouldn't have been so nonchalant about giving a wand to a Dark creature.

The lift was packed with people, and Remus wondered how many of them would have wanted to be in such a tight space with a werewolf if they knew.

Should he have disclosed his status as a dangerous beast at the entrance? He had thought that it wasn't necessary because he was registered, but maybe he should have said it, anyway. Could he get in trouble if someone realised that he hadn't outright stated that he, a werewolf, was going to be roaming the Ministry hallways with unsuspecting humans?

He got off the lift with several other people, but he was the only one headed to the Alpha Mating Registry. He noticed his footsteps getting slower the closer he got to his destination. His stomach was churning with anxiety.

Was it really necessary for him to be there?

The Ministry wouldn't be able to find him if he fled the country.

He stopped by the nondescript door with a small, worn-out plaque stating that he had reached the Alpha Mating Registry. He took a deep breath and released it slowly. Then he took another deep breath and released it even more slowly. He raised his hand, then let it drop back to his side, and took yet another deep breath.

They couldn't have already set everything up. They would not assign him a mate that day. It was going to be nothing but a conversation about his options.

But what options were there? His only option was to have the Ministry appoint him a mate, and that was it. Or maybe they would tell him that werewolves weren't eligible for an appointed mate, and therefore he would have to spend the rest of his life under lock and key.

Whatever it was, he was going to find out soon. He only had to open the door and go in.

After another deep breath, he determinedly pushed the door open and entered. He found himself in a small reception area. A wizard was talking to the receptionist at the reception desk. He was tall and his dark hair was wild, his dark robes immaculate. When Remus stepped farther in, he could see that the man wore glasses. His profile was attractive. Remus averted his eyes and stepped a bit to the side to wait for his turn.

"I really can't say," the receptionist said. "I'm going to have to ask."

"When can you ask?" the attractive man asked.

"I will ask immediately after one of our specialists is free," the receptionist assured him. "It shouldn't take long. Please, take a seat. I'll call for you once I know something."

The man didn't look particularly impressed, but nodded, glanced at Remus, and headed to the sitting area. Remus shifted his focus to the receptionist before the man had sat down.

"Hello," the receptionist said with a bright smile as Remus approached. "How can I help you?"

"Oh," Remus said and cleared his throat. "Yes. I... I have an appointment?"

"Right," the receptionist said, turning to look at a thick book. "Name?"

"Remus Lupin."

The receptionist searched the book for a moment, then looked up with a smile. "Yes. You have an appointment with Healer Hickinbottom. You will be called once he's ready to see you."

Remus blinked, feeling like he had forgotten something. "Right."

The receptionist smiled at him and turned to the book again, writing something down.

"Right," Remus repeated. "Thank you."

With stiff legs, he made his way to the seating area and settled down on a rickety chair, several chairs away from the attractive man who was watching him from the corner of his eye. Remus fidgeted with his fingers and pretended not to notice the gaze.

What was there to look at?

The man seemed to be around Remus's age, so he must have been there for the same reason Remus was. It wasn't unusual for an alpha to need Ministry interference because they had failed to find a mate on their own.

It wasn't.

Pathetic.

No, he wasn't pathetic. He was normal—it was normal. He was a werewolf, and therefore not normal, but the situation was normal. There must be plenty of alphas who needed an assigned mate.

How did they assign mates, anyway? They needed volunteers, surely, but did they get enough? Did omegas get compensation for volunteering? Was it possible for there to be a situation where the Ministry had no omega volunteers, so two alphas were paired together, even though they preferred omegas?

Could they do that?

A door opened somewhere. Remus turned towards the sound and saw a disgruntled-looking woman walking towards the reception area. Her heels were echoing in the corridor. She looked tired underneath the displeasure.

Their eyes met accidentally. The woman frowned, and Remus averted his eyes in shame.

It was none of his business.

Could he be paired with her, even though he preferred men?

The woman stepped up to the receptionist.

"I need to set up a new appointment," she said.

Remus tuned out the mundane process of setting up an appointment. He noticed that the handsome man was still watching him, now more obviously than before.

A door opened again. This time, a man approached the reception area. He was a Ministry worker, wearing the same purple robes the receptionist was wearing. He stepped behind the reception desk, reaching for a wad of parchment, but the receptionist stopped him. They were speaking at such low volume that Remus couldn't hear what they said, but the man looked thoughtful.

"I'll have to check," he eventually said.

The receptionist handed him a different wad of parchment than the one he had been reaching for, and, looking distracted, he returned to his room. Remus wondered if he had been Healer Hickinbottom. Maybe it would soon be Remus's turn.

Remus glanced at the clock on the wall. 'Late,' it told him.

Remus frowned. It was hardly his fault that he hadn't been called in yet.

The receptionist left her spot, briskly walked down the corridor, and then knocked on the door the man had disappeared behind. She went in.

Remus wondered if she was Edith Wilkins.

“Were you supposed to have an appointment just now?” a voice asked from Remus’s left side.

Remus turned to meet the questioning gaze of the attractive man.

“It’s my fault they’re not taking you in now,” the man said. “Sorry about that.”

Remus frowned. “How could it be your fault?”

“Ah, you see,” the man said, turning more towards Remus. “I wasn’t sure if I needed to come here at all, so I popped by to ask, but it wasn’t as straightforward as I had hoped.”

“Oh.”

Remus didn’t know if he should say more. Was it polite to ask questions? Or was it more polite to leave it?

Popped by to ask indicated that the man had been around the Ministry for another reason, didn’t it? Otherwise, he would have owed them, wouldn’t he?

He was still watching Remus, now with a smile.

“I’m James,” he said.

“Remus,” Remus responded, although he wasn’t sure he wanted to introduce himself to a man at the reception area of the Alpha Mating Registry.

He idly noted that James didn’t seem to be wearing a visitor’s badge on his robes, which must mean that he was a Ministry employee.

“So,” James said, grinning. “Are you here to register a relationship?”

Remus couldn’t help snorting. James’s smile grew wider.

“No?” he asked, mock innocent. “What is a handsome alpha such as yourself doing, not mated yet? I bet you get plenty of offers.”

The small smile that had been tugging on the corners of Remus’s mouth fell abruptly. He turned away just enough not to look at James any longer, but—hopefully—not enough to appear that he was upset.

“Hey,” James said in a tone of voice that suggested that he had, in fact, realised that Remus was upset. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything bad by it. I know it’s... I mean, I’m here myself, aren’t I? I’m not trying to judge.”

Remus hummed and nodded, but didn’t turn back. The back of his neck was hot with humiliation.

“Hey, Remus. We’re the same age, aren’t we? How come I don’t remember you from Hogwarts? Were we in different houses?”

Remus considered for a moment, but then, in a clipped voice, said, “I didn’t go.”

“You didn’t go... to Hogwarts?” James asked in disbelief. “At all?”

“At all,” Remus repeated quietly.

“Oh.”

Remus glanced at him, finding him blinking behind his glasses, looking stunned. The reception was eerily quiet.

“I was homeschooled,” Remus said.

“Oh. Well. That explains it, then, doesn’t it? I’m sure I would have remembered a handsome bloke like you.”

Remus frowned, watching James from the corner of his eye.

Was he flirting with Remus?

Why on earth would someone as attractive as James flirt with Remus? He was probably desperate to find a mate on his own before the Ministry would appoint him one.

Wasn’t Remus equally desperate, though? He may not have been actually trying, but he sure wished that he could have found a mate on his own rather than go through the shameful process of being appointed one because he was socially inept and unable to form relationships.

“How did you like it?” James asked. “Homeschooling? Are both your parents magical?”

Remus could have kept quiet and pretended that James and his questions didn’t exist. He didn’t know what James was trying to do, but it sounded as if Remus was being profiled.

“It was okay,” he said, much to James’s delight if the way James’s face lit up was anything to go by. “I guess it was quite lonely.”

He frowned at himself. Was he going to give James his full life story while he was at it?

“I can only imagine,” James said. “Why didn’t you go to Hogwarts?”

Remus glanced at James before looking down at his own hands. His fingers were all tangled together.

“You don’t have to say,” James hurried to add. “I understand it’s personal.”

Remus shrugged. “I was sick a lot. It was easier.”

James nodded, looking serious.

Remus glanced at the clock. ‘Very late,’ it was now telling him. He scoffed at it.

“What house do you think you’d have been in?” James then asked. “If that’s not an insensitive question to ask. On second thought, it probably is. Sorry.”

Remus couldn’t help the chuckle that escaped him. He turned a bit more towards James. James’s grin had melted into a genuine-looking smile.

“Maybe Ravenclaw,” Remus said. “My dad was in Ravenclaw.”

“And your mum?” James asked.

“She’s a Muggle,” Remus said. Then, after a moment’s hesitation, he asked, “What about your parents?”

“Both magical,” James said.

He was a pure-blood, then. Remus always felt somewhat uneasy around pure-blood wizards. He worried that they might have been taught ways of identifying werewolves, even though every book he had read had either said it was impossible to recognise a werewolf in human form or listed increasingly ridiculous features.

“I didn’t even give you my full name, did I?” James prattled on. “James Potter.”

He extended a hand towards Remus, who stared at it as if it might attack. He had heard of the Potters. They were pure-bloods, but not a part of the Sacred Twenty-Eight. A respectable family, he could remember his father telling his mother during breakfast. Apparently, they had taken in the eldest Black son after his disinheritance, although it was all very hush-hush.

Remus reached out and shook James’s hand.

“Remus Lupin,” he said.

If James happened to recognise his name from the Werewolf Registry—Remus wasn’t sure why he thought James would have—he gave no indication of it.

“Nice to meet you, Remus Lupin,” James said with a grin, but he still seemed genuine. “I work here at the Ministry. I’m an—”

The door opened, and the receptionist stepped into the corridor, cutting off James’s words.

“Mr Potter?” she said. “Come with me, please.”

“Oh, all right,” James said. He turned an apologetic grin at Remus. “I’ll try to be quick so they can get to you soon.”

Remus gave him a tight smile and a nod.

As the door closed, Remus wondered what James had been about to say. Which Ministry workers had a title that started with a vowel? Or had the opening door tricked Remus into

hearing incorrectly? That was a possibility.

He probably wasn't an Unspeakable. Remus didn't think they were eager to tell people what they did for a living.

The worst possibility was him being someone who worked at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, especially the Beast Division. Remus's experiences with every person he had ever encountered there were less than pleasant. It was a good thing they had approved of his father's shed as an appropriate place for his transformations, so he didn't need to deal with them very often. He only had to show up once a year at the Registry to tell them that yes, he was, regrettably, still alive and still transformed in the shed, and then the Ministry would send a surly wizard—they were always male alphas—to check the shed and the protections he had in place before he would be left in peace for another year.

In fact, he'd just had the pleasure of visiting the Werewolf Registry a few days before his birthday and being escorted home by a Ministry worker who looked at him as if he was about to pounce any minute. Remus had been especially polite, but the Ministry worker hadn't been impressed.

Another year of him disappointing the Werewolf Registry by not dropping dead. He was sure that every time he visited the Registry to update his status as being alive, the worker in charge of the Register that day looked disappointed. Especially after they checked his information and saw that he had been a werewolf since he was a little child.

Why are you alive? their eyes seemed to ask. *How have you not killed yourself?*

It was a good question.

But it also wasn't.

Why would he kill himself?

He sighed and stared at the clock that was now telling him that he was 'catastrophically late'. He wished it was a normal clock that simply told him what time it was.

'Rude,' the clock answered.

Remus hadn't realised it could do that.

How mad would he feel if he had a conversation with a clock?

He wondered what it was about James that had put his needs before Remus's, and why it was taking so long. Was it the fact that James worked at the Ministry? And that Remus was a werewolf? Of course—Ministry workers before werewolves.

Remus sighed again. The clock was still telling him that he was late, and he wondered if he should leave, run away, and never come back.

Would the Werewolf Registry hunt him down? Or would they assume that he had finally done the decent thing and died?

The door opened and James stepped into the corridor, looking mildly annoyed and followed by the receptionist, who headed straight to her desk and started writing frantically. James sat down again; this time a couple of chairs closer to Remus.

“Back to waiting, then,” he said and gave a joyless laugh.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Remus said.

James smiled at him, seeming a bit happier. Then the door opened again. The Ministry worker stepped into the corridor and looked towards James and Remus.

“Mr Lupin?” he called.

“Yes,” Remus said and sprung up.

He glanced at James and gave a small wave, then hurried after the man.

“I’m Healer Warwick Hickinbottom,” the man said, offering Remus a hand but then pulling it away before Remus had a chance to shake it. “Please, take a seat.”

He gestured towards a chair, the same rickety kind as the ones at the reception. Remus sat down. Healer Hickinbottom shuffled the parchments on his desk.

“Now, Mr Lupin,” he said, without looking up from the parchment. “You are here because you have not registered a mate, isn’t that correct?”

“Yes.”

Healer Hickinbottom turned to look at him. “And do you have a mate you simply haven’t registered yet?”

“No.”

Healer Hickinbottom nodded, looking glum. “I see.”

Remus didn’t know what to say, so he said nothing.

He got the distinct impression that Healer Hickinbottom was disappointed in him. He had probably caused the Alpha Mating Registry lots of work because of his social incompetence.

Healer Hickinbottom sighed. “Mr Lupin, allow me to be frank.”

Remus nodded, eyes wide and focused on Healer Hickinbottom’s forehead.

“We’ve never had,” Healer Hickinbottom said slowly, gesturing with his hand as he searched for the right words, “anyone of your... affliction... who needed a mate.”

“Oh,” Remus said, then bit his lip.

“You see, usually the alphas with your... condition... already have been in a registered relationship when they... were inflicted... Or, in other cases, they have not lived long enough to require our services.”

Remus had nothing to say. The fear was cold in his gut.

“We’re not sure what to do with you, Mr Lupin. We have the usual pool of mate candidates, but... You see, when people volunteer as mates for the Ministry, they’re doing so under the assumption that their future mate will be... will be fully human. And thusly, we cannot assume that any of them would be willing... would willingly enter a bond with... You see, it's a lifetime commitment, and committing to a... to someone with your... It's too much to ask, frankly.”

Remus blinked hard to keep his eyes from tearing up. He was staring at Healer Hickinbottom's cheek.

“Is... Perhaps,” Healer Hickinbottom said, “you could give it another try and find a mate on your own?”

Remus blinked harder and shook his head. He was too terrified of sobbing to open his mouth.

“No?” Healer Hickinbottom asked, sounding tired. “I see. Well. We’re going to have to discuss this further with the staff. I’m going to consult some of my colleagues immediately, and then we’ll resume our conversation. Yes?”

Remus nodded.

“Good,” Healer Hickinbottom said. “If you could wait at the reception, and I’ll let you know once we have... a solution. Or at least a direction to head towards.”

Remus nodded again and stood up. His legs felt weak. Healer Hickinbottom stood up as well, extending a hand to Remus, then pulling it away before Remus could react to it.

“Right,” Healer Hickinbottom said.

He opened the door, gesturing for Remus to go through. Remus did so, head held down and eyes focused on the floor. Slowly, he made his way back towards the reception. The door closed behind him and Healer Hickinbottom hurried past him, a quick “excuse me” muttered on the way.

Remus glanced up enough to see James Potter still sitting in the reception, watching him, but rather than sit down, Remus headed to the reception desk.

“Excuse me,” he managed to say without his voice wobbling too hard.

The receptionist had been in a whispered discussion with Healer Hickinbottom and turned around, looking surprised.

“The toilets?” Remus asked.

The fewer words he needed to utter before he'd had a moment to calm down, the better.

"Right along that corridor," the receptionist said, pointing towards a corridor in the opposite direction to Healer Hickinbottom's office. "First door on the left."

"Thank you," Remus muttered, but the receptionist had already turned back to Healer Hickinbottom, who was watching Remus warily.

Remus meandered to the correct door and locked himself inside. His eyes were still prickling with tears and he swallowed several times, attempting to calm down.

He should have known.

And he *had* known, hadn't he? He had known that it couldn't be easy, that there was going to be an issue because he was a monster and nobody wanted to bind themselves to a monster.

He washed his face. His eyes were awfully red, but he didn't think he looked like he had cried.

What would happen to him?

If they couldn't find him a mate, what would they do?

They couldn't send him away without a mate; they couldn't risk a werewolf having an Alpha Outbreak.

But what could they possibly do?

Chapter End Notes

The coding for the letter is from [How to Mimic Letters, Fliers, and Stationery Without Using Images by La_Temperanza](#)

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Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“James Potter?” the man seated behind the desk asked.

James stepped forward. The man stood up to shake his hand.

“I’m Healer Warwick Hickinbottom,” he said. “Edith tells me you had an unusual situation.”

“Yes,” James said, and sat down when Hickinbottom gestured to a chair. “I’ve been trying to do some research, but can’t seem to find any answers.”

“Right,” Hickinbottom said and nodded. “And what exactly is the situation?”

“I used to be mated,” James said. “We were mated for several years and we have a child together, but we’re no longer together. Does that bond still make me immune to Outbreak, or should I find a new mate before I turn thirty?”

“I see,” Hickinbottom said, rubbing his chin. “At what age did you mate with your previous mate?”

“We were eighteen,” James said.

Hickinbottom nodded, picked up a quill, dipped it into ink, and wrote something.

“How long has it been since the bond was broken?” the receptionist—Edith?—asked.

Hickinbottom looked annoyed at the interruption, but turned to James with an anticipative expression.

“It’s been four years,” James said.

“Four,” Hickinbottom muttered and wrote it down. “And you have a child together?”

“Yes.”

“Sex and dynamic?”

“Whose?”

“The child’s.”

“He’s a male omega,” James said. “Does that matter?”

“I’m not sure,” Hickinbottom said and frowned at his notes. He turned to James again. “I haven’t personally dealt with a situation like this before, but I’m sure you can’t be the first

one. I'll have to ask my colleagues if they know how to deal with this."

James nodded.

"I suspect," Hickinbottom continued, "that you might need to have a new mate. The bond between you and your former mate has been broken for such a long time, it's likely that no mating hormones remain in your system, and those hormones are the key to preventing Alpha Outbreak."

"I see. I thought it might have been too long."

Hickinbottom nodded. "I'll have to consult my colleagues first, but I think it's safe to assume that you will have to find a mate. Do you currently have a prospective mate?"

"No. I suppose I'm going to have to go through the process of being assigned one, then?"

"Probably," Hickinbottom said. "Do you have preferences? As it's almost certain that you'll need a mate, we might as well get started with the details."

"I don't think I have preferences."

"Is it because you were mated so young? What was your former partner's sex and dynamic?"

"She was a female omega. But I don't think I prefer female omegas over any other options."

"I see, I see," Hickinbottom said and wrote something down. "The process will be smoother if you really do not have a preference."

James bristled at the accusing tone but chose not to comment. It was obvious to him that Hickinbottom was going to only introduce him to female omegas.

"Edith," Hickinbottom said, handing a wad of parchment to her. "You can start on the paperwork. Mr Potter." He turned to James. "I'll have a chat with my colleagues and then tell you how we'll proceed. I'll have to take care of an appointment first, but it shouldn't take long."

"Oh," James said and blinked. "I'm on my lunch break."

"It won't take too long," Hickinbottom said reassuringly, failing to reassure James, who had already spent a part of his break waiting.

"Right," James said.

It was probably better to get it out of the way immediately.

"We'll speak in a moment," Hickinbottom said and stood up.

James followed his lead, shook his hand, and was then led out by Edith. She immediately went to work, and James wondered what it was she was writing.

He couldn't help noticing the nagging sense of humiliation of having his personal life and preferences scrutinised by people who didn't know him, and all because he no longer had a mate.

He sat down, this time closer to Remus, hoping that it wouldn't frighten him. Remus seemed overly cautious, and normally, James wouldn't have paid him any mind, but there was something about him that he found alluring.

Could it be his scent?

"Back to waiting, then," James said and laughed.

His voice revealed exactly how he felt towards the process of being assigned a mate.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Remus said.

His voice was low and pleasant and sent a shiver down James's spine. James wanted to listen to it more. He was just wondering what he could say that would get Remus to talk when the door opened and Hickinbottom stepped out.

"Mr Lupin?" he called.

"Yes," Remus said and stood up. He shyly waved at James before hurrying to Hickinbottom's office.

It was only after the door closed behind them that James realised how much he had unconsciously leaned towards Remus.

He wondered why Remus was there. Surely someone as cute as him could have easily found a mate.

Then again—as James had pointed out to Remus—James was there too, and it wasn't because he couldn't find a mate.

Well, he supposed it was partially because he couldn't find a mate. Otherwise, he wouldn't need to be there in the first place, but he'd had a long-term mate before. He simply hadn't felt like finding a new one.

Remus could have had a mate and then lost them. He didn't have a mating mark—and he was at the Alpha Mating Registry in the first place—so he couldn't have been mated in a while. James tried to remember how long it had taken for his own mark to fade completely after his break-up. Possibly closer to a year.

He sighed and glanced at the clock. It said, 'Should be at work.'

He stood up and approached the reception desk. Edith looked up.

"Excuse me," he said with his most charming smile. "Could I send a memo to my boss? I didn't think it would take me this long to get out of here."

“Of course,” Edith said with her professional smile, and produced a piece of purple parchment and a quill.

“Thank you.”

James scribbled down a quick note stating that he was sorry, but he was going to be significantly late, as he had not been allowed to leave the Registry before they had settled his case. He took out his wand and sent the memo on its way. He looked after it, longing to follow it out of the Registry.

James returned to the seating area and settled down to wait.

He wondered about Remus again. Was he always so reserved, or was he merely nervous because he was there to be assigned a mate?

Then James realised that because Hickinbottom was currently talking to Remus, he was not consulting with his colleagues; he would consult with them after he was done with Remus, and who knew how long that would take. James hadn’t been in for too long, but then, his case was unique, and Hickinbottom hadn’t known what to do with him.

James sighed and slumped back in his chair. How long would a normal appointment take? He assumed that Hickinbottom was going to talk about the process more than he had with James. He would ask about Remus’s preferences—the idea made James’s stomach twist funnily—and then he would probably discuss the odds of Remus getting a mate who fit his preferences.

What if they had no... male omegas looking for a male alpha mate when a male alpha requested a male omega? Could they force an alpha to choose a mate whose sex or dynamic didn’t align with their preferences? Was it possible to mate with someone if either one or both of the partners weren’t attracted to each other?

James supposed it was possible to have sex with a partner whom one wasn’t attracted to, but mating? He couldn’t imagine it. If he was told to mate with... who was someone he liked but wasn’t attracted to? Sirius. If James was told to mate with Sirius, could he do it?

Sex with Sirius hadn’t been an issue the few times they’d fooled around back at Hogwarts, but the idea of mating with him... biting his mating gland while he bit James’s... the idea sent shivers down James’s spine, and they were not the good kind of shivers.

He hoped that Sirius never found out about the thought exercise he had just gone through.

James was wondering if Edith would have something for him to read while he waited, when the door to Hickinbottom’s office opened, and Remus walked out. His head was turned down, and it was immediately obvious to James that something was wrong.

Remus looked small and defeated, and he seemed to be on the verge of tears. Hickinbottom hurried past him and went straight to Edith, starting a whispered conversation with her. Remus’s footsteps were slow.

Remus glanced at James, eyes shining with unshed tears, and the sight of it tugged at James's heartstrings. Remus quickly turned his eyes away and headed to the reception desk, asking for the toilets. James watched him go with a worried frown on his face.

What could have made him cry like that?

Maybe he had tragically lost his previous mate and being at the Registry brought back painful memories. James wondered how difficult it would be to be forced to mate with someone new while still mourning the loss of a dearly beloved mate.

Hickinbottom left the reception desk but didn't return to his office—he went to a different corridor altogether. James heard him knock on a door and then go in. He was already speaking to someone before the door closed.

James wondered why he had been sent to Hickinbottom if there were other people working. If Hickinbottom could go in and ask for a consultation on James's case, why couldn't Edith have assigned James to that person? Instead, James had been the reason Remus had had to wait for a long time before his appointment, just so James could have a spontaneous consultation about his case.

James turned to look towards where Remus had gone. Remus's voice had been shaky as he had asked for the toilets, and James hated to think that Remus was crying there, all alone.

It took quite a while of James drumming his leg with his fingers and wondering if it would be terribly impolite of him to go check on Remus, a near stranger, before he heard a door open. With bated breath, he waited until he could tell that the approaching footsteps were coming from the toilets. Soon, Remus emerged from behind the corner.

James attempted to appear nonchalant as he turned towards Remus and waved.

Much to James's delight, Remus waved back. His eyes weren't very red—although, it probably only meant that Remus had waited long enough to appear not to have cried recently.

James had expected Remus to head to the reception desk to make a new appointment before leaving, but much to his surprise, Remus headed to the seating area and sat down. Much to James's disappointment, however, he sat farther away from James than he had been seated earlier.

"I guess the process isn't as straightforward as I imagined," James said.

Remus hummed in response but said nothing. He wasn't even looking at James—he was staring at the floor.

He must have still been mourning his lost mate.

James opened his mouth, but then closed it when he heard a door open and close. He waited, and just as he had hoped, Hickinbottom soon appeared. He was carrying heavy tomes, and rolls of parchment were precariously teetering on top of them. After dropping off a few of the rolls to Edith, he resumed towards his own office.

“Nothing yet, Mr Potter,” he said. “Won’t be much longer.”

James frowned at that. Then Hickinbottom stopped next to Remus.

“Mr Lupin,” he said.

Remus raised his head, but rather than look hopeful, he looked desolate. James’s frown deepened.

“I forgot to ask,” Hickinbottom said. “What are your preferences in a mate?”

“What?” Remus breathed out, eyes widening.

“What are your preferences? Sex? Dynamic?”

Remus glanced at James, clearly uneasy, and James was sure that Hickinbottom was violating some regulation, most likely even a law—James should brush up on his knowledge on privacy laws—asking such personal questions in public. It was bold of him to do so in front of an Auror.

“Male or female?” Hickinbottom asked impatiently when Remus stayed silent.

“I,” Remus stuttered, speaking quietly but unable to prevent James from hearing. “I... Male.”

James pretended not to hear and turned his head in the opposite direction to give Remus a modicum of privacy.

“And,” Hickinbottom asked, giving a significant pause, “*alpha* or omega?”

James’s frown deepened.

Had Hickinbottom just told Remus to say alpha?

James couldn’t help turning back to the conversation, taking in Remus’s uncertainty.

“I,” Remus said, then his words seemed to get stuck in his throat.

“What was that?” Hickinbottom asked, his tone getting rude. “Did you say alpha?”

Remus shook his head. “I—I don’t have a preference.”

“Good,” Hickinbottom said.

He turned back towards his office and went in.

James turned his attention to Remus, who was staring at the wall, eyes still wide and face red in embarrassment.

“He shouldn’t have done that,” James said before he could decide whether it was a good idea to point out that he had listened in on a personal conversation.

Slowly, Remus turned to look at him.

“He’s not allowed to ask you personal questions when an outsider can hear,” James said.

Something about Remus’s lack of indignation was making James angrier.

Remus stared at him, face frozen, and said, “It’s okay.”

“No,” James snapped, making Remus jump in his chair. “It’s not okay. You don’t need to put up with such disrespect.”

Remus’s face darkened, and he turned away again. James opened his mouth to argue, but Remus beat him to it.

“It’s okay,” he said, his tone now completely different. “I don’t mind.”

Except he had clearly minded. James didn’t understand why Remus was allowing someone like Hickinbottom to trample all over his right to privacy. Seeing him act like such a wet blanket infuriated James, but the way he had stood up for himself with James was intriguing.

“You should mind,” James decided to try.

“No,” Remus said, and his tone brooked no argument.

Remus looked like steel, sitting there in his chair, his scent as well as his posture emanating power and confidence. James’s heart skipped a beat as he watched the transformation from a meek man into a self-assured alpha and wondered why it wasn’t the side Remus showed Hickinbottom.

“Do you really not have a preference?” James asked because, apparently, he had no sense of propriety. “Or did you only say that because he wanted you to?”

Remus glanced at James, and his eyes felt like a touch. Not a caress—a full-on touch that pressed against James. James’s breath hitched, and he was sure that Remus noticed it.

“I thought,” Remus said, his low voice seeming even lower, “it was obvious he wanted me to say alpha.”

James couldn’t say anything.

He wasn’t sure it had ever happened before.

Maybe the first time he had seen Lily? It had been so many years ago—he had relived that moment so many times—that he was no longer sure how much of it was real and how much of it was his own embellishment.

James swallowed. Then he nodded.

Remus turned to glare at the clock. James wondered what time it was for Remus. A glance at the clock told him he was no longer late for work. ‘Waiting,’ it said instead.

Useless piece of magic.

James returned his attention to Remus. He had observed—too many times to count—Sirius go all alpha and confident, yet it had always felt very different. Remus seemed to ooze raw power, something more primal than Sirius's confidence that was often put on. Remus wasn't pretending, no. He was merely being himself, not holding anything back, and it was titillating.

James cleared his throat. He could see Remus perk up.

"So," James said, suddenly feeling self-conscious next to Remus. "Do you like Quidditch?"

Remus snorted, but then turned to look at James with a soft smile. James felt extremely seen.

"Quidditch?" Remus asked, shaking his head in amusement. "I knew you'd be into Quidditch."

"Oh?" James asked, finding the higher functions of his brain hard to reach when Remus looked at him, smelling so enticing.

"You've played. It's obvious from the way you carry yourself."

"Really?" James asked, wondering about the fact that Remus had looked at him closely enough to make such an observation.

"To answer your initial question, no, I don't like Quidditch."

"Oh. Why?"

Remus was still smiling. "I don't see the point of it."

"What? What do you mean?"

"The way the game is structured doesn't make sense to me."

"How so?"

"It usually comes down to who catches the Snitch, doesn't it? So why is the rest of it there? I guess the Bludgers make sense as a distraction to the Seekers, but what's the point of the rest of it? Why not just watch the Seekers find a Snitch?"

"Oh, Remus, Remus," James said and shook his head. "Have you ever tried only following the Seekers in a game? Because I have. And let me tell you, it's boring. Merlin, it's boring. It's very rare for the Snitch to be found quickly, and the Seekers are spending all that time mostly flying around, looking for it. Not much happens."

Remus said nothing, but raised a brow.

"That's why you need the rest of the team there," James continued. "For some action."

“Then what’s the point of having Seekers at all?”

“How else would you know when to end the game?”

“Maybe when one team reaches a certain score? A time limit?”

James scoffed, but couldn’t help smiling, simply because Remus was paying undivided attention to him. “What’s the fun in that? There’s no opportunity for a tie if the cut-off is at a certain score.”

“What’s wrong with a time limit, then?”

“Too unimaginative,” James responded haughtily, laughter bubbling up in him. “It’s a part of the appeal, not knowing how long a game will take.”

“What if you paid a high price for tickets to the Quidditch World Cup and then it ended in five minutes? Wouldn’t you be annoyed?”

James didn’t know how to challenge that. He really would be annoyed if he had the chance to sit at a World Cup and then not get to enjoy the game any longer than a few minutes.

“More drama,” he finally settled on.

Remus laughed. It was a joyful sound, and James yearned to hear it again.

“So,” Remus then asked, “what position did you play?”

“I was a Chaser. A bloody good one, too. I could have gone professional.”

“But didn’t?”

“No. I... I had just started a relationship, and I didn’t want to put her through the irregular schedule of a professional Quidditch player.”

“Oh,” Remus said, and a spark in him seemed to die.

James desperately wanted to see it reignited.

“It was a good choice,” he said. “I’m not sure I would have enjoyed playing professionally. The more I think about it, the more certain I am I made the right choice. Have you seen what happens if you get badly hit by a Bludger?”

Remus smiled, but it was waning.

“Have you ever played?” James asked, trying to find something that would make Remus glow again.

Remus gave a derisive snort. “When? I was homeschooled. There weren’t chances for me to play.”

“Oh, right,” James said and bit his lip. “Sorry. I... I forgot.”

Remus shrugged. He straightened up, which alerted James to the fact that he had leaned closer to James during their conversation.

“Do you like flying?” James asked, voice now uncertain in a way he disliked.

“Not really. I prefer to keep my feet on the ground.”

James smiled, but he was losing steam, too. Something about Remus had energised him, and he appeared to have synchronised himself with Remus’s moods.

Before James could reorient himself, the door to Hickinbottom’s office opened, and he stepped into the corridor.

“Mr Potter,” he called.

James gave Remus a tight smile, then headed to Hickinbottom’s office.

“So,” Hickinbottom said as James had sat down. “I have discussed your case with my colleague.”

He pushed aside the tomes he had carried in earlier. The ones with clear names on the spines were on Dark creatures, and James couldn’t even begin to imagine how they would be relevant reading for someone working at the Alpha Mating Registry.

Unless they had a Dark creature that needed a mate?

James turned his attention to Hickinbottom, who had opened one of the rolls of parchment.

“We have come to the conclusion,” Hickinbottom said, “that you do, indeed, require a mate. What mating does is that it produces a specific hormone, and that hormone is the only reliable way of preventing Alpha Outbreak. There has been little research on the subject, but we are relatively sure that the hormone is only present in the body while the bond between two mates is regularly renewed or when a couple has been bonded for an exceptionally long time. As you have not been bonded in several years and your mark has completely faded, there is no presence of the hormone in your body. Therefore, we must find you a mate.”

James nodded.

“The process isn’t too complicated,” Hickinbottom said. “We have omegas who volunteer as potential mates, and alphas preferring alphas can find their mate among the other unmated alphas who are currently a part of the program. We understand that mating is a lifetime commitment and can’t be frivolously taken care of, so you are allowed to meet with several candidates and see how you get along with them. Hopefully, we will find a mutually beneficial pairing.”

James nodded again.

“Now,” Hickinbottom said, “for security reasons, you will meet any potential mates here at the Registry when you meet for the first time. Some prefer a couple of meetings here in a

controlled environment, while others will wish to have any future meetings outside. It's completely up to you and your potential mate."

James nodded, then asked, "What if I want to volunteer?"

Hickinbottom seemed to lose his train of thought, stopping to stare at James in apparent disbelief. "I beg your pardon?"

"What if I want to volunteer? You said that alphas who prefer alphas can find their mate among other alphas currently in the program, so what if I want to do that?"

"Oh." Hickinbottom was trying to grab his quill, unable to stop staring at James. "I... I did not think you would be interested in that."

James had known it! He was now even more certain that each contact Hickinbottom had prepared for him was with a female omega.

"It is," Hickinbottom said, floundering, "I mean to say that you... If that is what you would like to do, then yes, we can... we can volunteer you into... into the pool of candidates."

James smiled at him as warmly as he could.

"I think I'd like that," he said. "I can look at the other options too, of course. Meet some of them. But I'd really like to volunteer as an alpha looking for an alpha."

Hickinbottom cleared his throat, dipped his quill in ink, and finally managed to turn his eyes away from James to write something. His movements were erratic.

"Right," Hickinbottom said, pushing the parchment he had been writing on towards James. "You can take this to Edith, and she will take care of... of adding you among the other volunteers."

"Good," James said with the brightest smile he could muster.

"Yes, right," Hickinbottom said, looking down at his desk. "I... I suppose I should ask... since it has recently become relevant... how do you feel about Dark creatures?"

James frowned at the question, glancing at the tomes on Hickinbottom's desk.

"Yes," Hickinbottom said. "Would you... By any chance, would you be open to... to considering a mating with... with... let's say, a werewolf?"

James's frown deepened at that.

"It is," Hickinbottom said, crossing his hands. "You see... We have... In the future, we may have a need for... for candidates willing... willing to... to perform such a mating."

"I see," James said, although he was still confused by the turn of events. "And... If we're talking about a werewolf, for example, would that somehow affect the mating? Would mating work differently at all?"

“Well,” Hickinbottom said, rubbing his chin, “we don’t... we have little data on that. There... there has been little interest in research in that area, so we are unsure. I understand if that changes your answer.”

“Which I hadn’t given yet.”

“Yes, quite so.”

“You’re a professional in mating, right?”

Hickinbottom looked surprised but nodded.

“So, in your professional opinion,” James asked, “do you think it would affect the mating in any way?”

“I...” Hickinbottom said and took a significant break before continuing. “In my professional opinion, the chances are that there is a difference. We simply do not know how significant, and what it would mean to a potential mate.”

James frowned. He really disliked Hickinbottom.

“So, I understand the hesitation,” Hickinbottom said. “It’s no wonder you want to refuse—”

“I haven’t answered you yet,” James said, and his bright smile had now turned into an icy glare. “And my answer is yes. I would be amenable to mating with a Dark creature. For example, a werewolf.”

Hickinbottom seemed at a loss for words.

“You should write it down on this,” James said, offering back the parchment he had been holding. “I don’t want Edith to think we didn’t discuss it properly beforehand.”

“Right,” Hickinbottom said and took the offered parchment.

He hesitated for a long time before dipping his quill in ink and writing, with a shaky hand, an addition to what he had written before. As he handed the parchment back to James, James made sure that the addition confirmed that his answer had been affirmative. To his surprise, Hickinbottom had written exactly that.

He turned a blinding smile to Hickinbottom. “Thank you very much for your help, Mr Hickinbottom.”

“Healer,” Hickinbottom muttered.

James stood up. “I’ll ask Edith for the contacts, shall I?”

“Y-Yes, yes,” Hickinbottom said and stood up to shake James’s hand. “She will help you with that.”

“Thank you,” James said, then left the room.

The moment he stepped into the corridor, his eyes landed on Remus, who was still sitting in the reception area, slumped in his chair and staring at the floor, an air of renunciation about him.

That was the moment it all clicked together.

Remus leaving Hickinbottom's office near tears. Hickinbottom's lack of respect towards him. The apparent difficulties with his case—now that James knew how quickly his own case got sorted. Hickinbottom's odd question about Dark creatures.

And, because of Hickinbottom's choice of an example, Remus had to be a werewolf.

It explained everything. It explained Remus's docile behaviour in the face of a clear breach of his rights. It explained the cold way Edith looked at him. It explained the wide berth Hickinbottom had given him as he had walked past.

James grinned to himself.

It appeared that he had secured a way to meet Remus again.

Remus didn't raise his head as James approached, so James decided to leave him be. He went straight to Edith and presented her with the roll of parchment.

"Is it possible for me to return later?" James asked. "I'm badly late for work."

"Yes, that's fine," Edith said. "I'll process you in the meantime, and once you come back, I'll have a list of potential mates ready for you."

"Thank you very much," James said, giving her a charming smile.

He gave Remus's desolate form another look, but as Remus was still determinedly staring at the floor, he left without saying anything.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Time was crawling. The clock kept insistently telling Remus that he was ‘waiting’. James had left a long time ago without saying goodbye—not that Remus thought there was a reason for James to acknowledge him after he had been released from the Registry. They had struck up a conversation because they were both waiting—that was the way waiting worked. Once it was over, one returned to their regular life and forgot all about the people who were still waiting.

Healer Hickinbottom had emerged from his office and visited a different office. Remus wondered what the other Registry workers were doing. They weren’t seeing clients; he was certain because there was no way someone else’s case took longer than Remus’s, and Remus hadn’t seen anyone else at the Registry since James left. James had had some difficulties with his case, and he had still been out of there within the hour—Remus assumed. He didn’t know what time it was.

Healer Hickinbottom returned to his office right when Remus was starting to get hungry. He hoped that it was a sign that Healer Hickinbottom would call him in soon and give him a solution, which would then allow him to leave to have something to eat.

A door opened. A witch Remus hadn’t seen before emerged from the corridor. She was wearing the same purple robes as the receptionist and Healer Hickinbottom. She gave the receptionist a cheery wave and a “see you tomorrow, Edith!”

Remus started measuring time with how hungry he got, but then had to divert his thoughts because the hunger was getting uncomfortable.

He couldn’t focus on anything else.

He got up and cautiously approached the reception desk.

“Excuse me,” he said.

Ms Wilkins raised her eyes at him, but her body language suggested that she didn’t care.

“I was wondering,” Remus said in as polite a tone as he could muster, “if it might be possible for me to pop out for a quick snack and then come back.”

“I would advise against it,” Ms Wilkins said, and her professional tone of voice and smile were in stark contrast with her body language. “Our experts are very busy, and it would inconvenience them if the clients aren’t here when they need to be.”

“I understand.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Remus returned to his seat.

‘Waiting,’ said the clock on the wall. Remus sighed.

He was staring at the clock, utterly bored, when the door to the Registry opened. He glanced towards the newcomer, only to find that it was James.

Hadn’t James said that he would be back after work? Was it already after work?

How long had Remus been waiting?

“Hello,” James said to Ms Wilkins. “I’m back.”

“Good to see you again, Mr Potter,” Ms Wilkins said, having immediately straightened up when James arrived. “I have compiled a list of suitable candidates for you. Here’s basic information on them. You can take your time going through the options and deciding who you might be interested in meeting in person. We will then help you get in contact with them.”

“Thank you very much,” James said. “I’ll come back in a day or two, I’m sure. Now, I’m going to leave, and I’ll take Mr Lupin with me.”

Remus’s head snapped up. Ms Wilkins was staring at James, her mouth open.

“B-But,” she stammered. “I can’t let him leave yet.”

“You haven’t processed his case yet? How long is your workday? Is Hickinbottom even working at this hour?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Poor sod,” James said and shook his head in apparent commiseration. “Well, that’s neither here nor there. I’ll be taking Mr Lupin with me.”

“He can’t leave yet,” Ms Wilkins said. “Not before Healer Hickinbottom has—”

“No,” James said. “You can’t keep him here indefinitely. He’s waited all day. Enough is enough. You’re going to reschedule his appointment.”

“You’re not an authority in this department,” Ms Wilkins began to say, but stopped when James took something out of his pocket and showed it to her.

Remus wasn’t sure how to feel. A part of him wanted James to stop making a fuss, as it could later lead to trouble for Remus, but a bigger part of him was very hungry and eager to leave.

“I think I’m an authority also in this department,” James said, voice low and menacing, and Remus wondered what on earth he meant. “Mr Lupin needs to take care of his basic human needs.”

Ms Wilkins gave a derisive snort at that. Remus wasn’t surprised. She was good at keeping up her professional front, but it was usually impossible for people to hide their disdain when they realised they were dealing with a werewolf rather than a human.

“Reschedule his appointment,” James repeated, then turned to look at Remus, who had been watching the conversation in a mixture of shock, horror, and relief. “Come here, Remus. Let her know when you’ll be available for a new appointment.”

Remus hesitated, but his hunger won over his need not to cause trouble, so he slowly stood up and made his way to the reception desk.

“Will you be available tomorrow?” Ms Wilkins asked without looking at Remus.

“Yes,” Remus said immediately, noting how she didn’t ask about the time of day.

Ms Wilkins wrote something, then glanced at him. “Tomorrow morning at eight o’clock. Don’t be late.”

“Thank you, Ms Wilkins,” Remus said with a smile.

She wasn’t looking.

“Come on then, Remus,” James said, pressing a hand to Remus’s lower back. “I’ll buy you dinner.”

Remus couldn’t find it in him to argue when his stomach growled right at that moment. He allowed James to lead him away from the Registry. They went in silence, James’s hand still resting on Remus’s back, and Remus wasn’t sure how to feel about it.

It was exciting.

It was terrifying.

James’s touch was warm and firm and all the things Remus dreamed about as he lay awake at night, bones aching with the approaching moon, dreaming of touch.

He couldn’t remember the last time someone had touched him so innocently, yet also so purposefully. He had faint memories of his mother stroking his hair and kissing his cheek when he was still human, but he wasn’t sure if they were real or if he had constructed them himself in the absence of love.

James guided Remus out of the Ministry, and they both transfigured their robes into Muggle clothes before they continued into a Muggle restaurant. James looked very good in his well-fitted trousers.

There were only a few words exchanged between them as they sat down. James recommended Remus try the lamb, and Remus, who hadn’t had the money to eat out in a long time, took his recommendation.

It was after the waiter had left with their orders that James turned to look at him with terrifyingly all-seeing eyes and asked, “Did they keep you there all day?”

Remus blinked in response.

“I’m wondering,” James said before Remus had time to form an answer of any kind. “Did they have a reason to keep you there for so long? How many times did you talk to Hickinbottom?”

“Once.”

“Only once?” James asked, raising his eyebrows. “You mean that he only talked to you that one time while I was there? And after that, you’ve been waiting?”

Remus shrugged but didn’t deny it.

“What a bunch of wankers,” James spat. “I can’t believe they would do something like that.”

Remus shrugged again and turned to look at his glass of wine. He could easily believe that they would treat him that way.

“How did your meeting with Hickinbottom go?” James asked. “You weren’t with him for a very long time. It seemed that he needed to do some research on your case, too?”

“On my case *too*?”

“Ah. I mean... he didn’t seem to be certain about me. Because I used to be mated. We were mated for several years, even, but... it didn’t work out between us, so we split up. And I received a letter from the Registry today, so I decided to immediately pop by to ask them if I need a new mate or if it’s enough that I’ve been mated before.”

“Oh.”

“He had to ask about it, but they still got it all done in a timely manner. For Merlin’s sake, they already had a list of candidates for me.”

Remus hummed and nodded, hoping that James wouldn’t ask him any specifics about what might have taken so long with his case.

“They can do it quickly,” James said. “I think they were being purposefully slow with you.”

Remus glanced at James, whose eyes were burning, focused on him.

“Remus,” James said, leaning forward. “I would like to come to your appointment with you tomorrow. No,” James hurried to add when Remus opened his mouth to protest, “I don’t mean I would attend your appointment. That’s personal. But I would like to come to the Registry with you and make sure they don’t make you wait all day again.”

Remus’s mouth was still open, ready to protest, but no sound came out.

James didn’t know what he was.

If James realised Remus wasn’t human, he wouldn’t offer, would he? He wouldn’t want to have anything to do with Remus. He would be happy that Remus had been made to wait.

“Think about it,” James said. “I’ll ask you again after dinner.”

Remus still hesitated, but nodded.

Should he tell James? Would he get into trouble if he didn’t tell? But if he told now, James wouldn’t want to treat him to dinner, and he was so hungry he felt faint. But if he told James afterwards, could he be blamed for tricking him into buying him dinner?

“What was your favourite subject?” James asked.

Remus raised his eyes at him. James was watching him with a pleasant smile on his face.

“In school,” James clarified when Remus remained quiet. “Which subject did you like the most?”

Remus blinked and hesitated before saying, “Defence Against the Dark Arts.”

“Yeah? It’s very interesting, isn’t it? I liked it a lot too. But I think my real favourite was Charms.”

“Oh? How so?”

James grinned and ruffled his hair, making it appear as though he had just got off a broom.

“Well, they’re the basis of all spell work, aren’t they? If you understand charms, you’ll understand everything else more easily.”

“Everything?” Remus asked, raising his brow.

James blushed and ruffled his hair again. “Not *everything*. I mean, things like Defence. It... it strongly relies on charms.”

Remus couldn’t help smiling. James Potter had seemed self-assured each time Remus had spoken with him, yet there he was, obviously flustered and trying to hide it.

“And,” James continued, blinking behind his glasses, “if you understand the basics, you can create your own spells.”

“That’s true.”

James’s face brightened.

“What do you like the most about Defence?” James asked.

Remus looked down at the table. He was just wondering if he should lie when the waiter appeared with their food. Remus was relieved, as the food diverted James’s thoughts away from their previous conversation and into a conversation about the food, which then evolved into a conversation about their favourite foods, which then turned into James telling Remus funny anecdotes to do with food.

James was a lot of fun. He made Remus forget that he usually avoided company. He made Remus feel good about himself without directly making it about Remus.

He was flirting with Remus.

Wasn't he? Remus had thought so earlier at the Registry, as well, but then James had said he used to be bonded to a woman, and Remus had assumed he wouldn't be interested in a man—especially an alpha man.

But now it seemed that he really was flirting with Remus.

They were waiting for their desserts when James eagerly leaned forward.

“Oh, hey,” he said. “I almost forgot. What is your favourite thing about Defence?”

Remus had not expected it, as he had already lulled himself into the assumption that the topic had been closed, so he didn't have time to wonder about how sensible it was before he answered, “The Dark creatures.”

James raised his brows and blinked, then grinned. “That's interesting. Why?”

“Oh. I... My father is an expert in Non-Human Spirituous Apparitions. He... he worked at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. It... I guess his... he was... more interested in teaching me that than... than some other things.”

There was a faint frown on James's face, and Remus wanted to know what it meant. James cocked his head.

“I guess he would be the most knowledgeable on that subject,” he said. He hesitated for a moment before asking, “Did you... did you ever want to follow in his footsteps?”

Remus was toying with his napkin and turned his eyes on that, watching how his fingers moved. “I... not directly. But... but something similar, perhaps.”

He didn't dare look at James and wished that their desserts would arrive soon to distract him.

“Can you conjure a Patronus?” James asked.

Remus turned his eyes up at James, who was smiling. Remus looked down again.

“Yes,” he said.

“I knew you could. I can tell you're one of those really smart people. What's your Patronus?”

Remus's eyes widened, and he turned his head down more. He should lie. He should lie.

He should lie, but he could suddenly not think of any animals.

“It's,” he said before the silence stretched suspiciously. “It's a... a canine... of sorts.”

“A canine?” James asked thoughtfully, and Remus chanced a glance at him. He was smiling and ruffled his hair. “My best friend’s Patronus is a dog, too.”

Remus nodded and hummed.

“Mine is a stag,” James said.

Remus glanced up, only to find James still watching him. He tried to come up with a different subject, but his thoughts seemed to have frozen completely.

Where was the waiter?

“What do you do for a living?” James asked.

Remus sighed. It wasn’t an ideal topic for conversation, but at least it was better than discussing Patronuses. At least his job didn’t bear any direct hints at his condition.

“I’m... I have a Muggle job,” Remus said.

“Really? What do you do?”

“I’m a librarian,” Remus muttered.

He glanced up and caught the way James’s face lit up.

“You’re a librarian,” James said. “That’s so... fitting. I wouldn’t say that you look like a librarian, but there’s... there’s something about you that makes it seem... I don’t mean this in a bad way, but you seem like the swotty type.”

Remus raised his brow and laughed. “I seem like the swotty type?”

“Well,” James said, squirming in his seat, blushing again. “I just mean... You’re not the athletic type, at least.”

Remus smiled at that. “I’m not.”

James gave him a tentative smile, and Remus’s smile grew wider.

“Did you need to do something special to become a librarian?”

“Oh, I,” Remus said, surprised by his own surprise at the question. “I went to Muggle uni. I... I’m a qualified archivist.”

“Really? Why did you choose that?”

“I... I guess it seemed like it would be useful. And something I would be good at.”

“Well, it got you a job, so I’d say it’s been useful.”

Remus nodded.

“I, of course, already told you this morning,” James said, then stopped and thought for a moment, a frown appearing between his brows. “Wait, I didn’t, did I? We were interrupted. I’m an—”

“Sorry for the wait,” the waiter said, appearing as if out of thin air by their table.

“That’s quite all right,” James said with a big smile.

“Can I refresh your drinks?”

James glanced at Remus, who shook his head.

“We’re fine, thank you,” James said.

The way he smiled at the waiter was different from the way he smiled at Remus, and Remus couldn’t understand why. Then James turned his attention back to him, and Remus forgot what he had been thinking about.

“You like chocolate, then?” James asked.

Remus smiled at his chocolate cake. “Yes.”

James said nothing. Remus glanced at him, only to find him looking pensive.

“Remus,” James said before Remus could ask about it. “I have a proposition.”

Remus blinked. He couldn’t even begin to guess what kind of proposition James might have for him.

“I know it’s,” James started, then sighed deeply. “I... This is very fast, and I understand that, but I like you a lot. And I was wondering... Maybe you might consider me as a potential mate?”

Remus dropped his fork. It clattered against his plate, but he could only stare.

“I have a good feeling about you,” James continued when Remus said nothing. “And, quite honestly, I’m not all that interested in going on several first dates with people. Especially because I’m sure Hickinbottom has only suggested female omegas as potential partners for me.”

“Is that an issue?”

“No, not as such. I just find it irritating how he decided I can’t be interested in any other dynamics simply because I was once bonded to a female omega.”

Remus didn’t know what to say, so he picked up his fork, although he wasn’t about to continue eating.

“Anyway,” James said. “I realise we’ve known each other for less than a day, but I’ve had fun with you. And we could... I don’t mean to suggest that we must mate immediately. I just

mean that maybe we could date for a bit and see if we still get along.”

He looked at Remus expectantly. Remus turned to look at his plate.

“You don’t need to decide right now,” James said. “But it might be good if we could tell them tomorrow that we’re considering mating with each other.”

James would not want to bind himself to Remus if he knew what Remus was.

Remus frowned. Was it time for him to say something about the lycanthropy? It seemed like the right moment, yet he couldn’t bring himself to even try to say it.

James would find out from the Registry.

Yes. They were going to be discussing it at the Registry, and they would tell James about him, and then James would change his mind.

Most importantly, it meant that Remus didn’t need to say it himself; he didn’t need to force it through his constricting throat. The Registry would take care of it for him.

“I,” Remus said, then cleared his throat. “I’ll think about it.”

“Good,” James said, and when Remus glanced at him, his smile was blinding.

The rest of their meal continued pleasantly. Remus thought that even James was somewhat subdued after his proposition, but he was also still flirting.

It was when they were standing outside the restaurant that James approached the topic again.

“You’ll think about it?” he asked.

“Yes,” Remus said, this time more confidently. “I’ll think about it.”

“I’ll meet you at the guest entrance to the Ministry in the morning. Half seven? So we’ll have some time to... to discuss?”

Remus nodded. “Yes. That’s good.”

“Good.”

James’s smile was blinding. For a moment, he looked as if he wanted something, as if he were about to lean forward and catch Remus’s lips in a kiss, but then he cleared his throat and straightened his jacket.

“I’ll see you in the morning, then,” James said. “Have a good night, Remus.”

The way James said Remus’s name was unbelievably soft.

“You too,” Remus said, his voice soft as well.

Remus managed not to worry before he was safely at home.

Remus didn't sleep much that night. Mainly, he worried about how James's behaviour towards him would change once he realised he had been talking to a werewolf—considering mating with a werewolf. Not telling James had been a coward's choice, and Remus was not proud of himself.

He was just tired of people always judging him because of something he couldn't control.

James had been the first person ever to express interest in mating with Remus. Granted, it was partly due to necessity—more than partly, if Remus was honest—and under normal circumstances, James wouldn't have suggested something like it.

Remus didn't know what to tell James when they met in the morning. He wanted to say yes because James was nice and he was almost certain that the Registry would not find him a willing mate, but his answer didn't really matter, did it? Even if he said yes, James would change his mind the moment he learned what Remus was.

Remus badly wanted to say yes. He badly wanted to believe that he could have someone as nice as James.

However, Remus was a realist and knew that he wasn't allowed to have the things he wanted.

He should say no. He should be responsible and say no. Why prolong the inevitable?

Remus was still repeating that thought to himself when he waited for James at the guest entrance to the Ministry.

He shouldn't prolong the inevitable. He should tell James no.

It was the only sensible thing to do.

Then he saw James walk up to him, waving happily, and Remus waved back with a smile.

"Good morning," James said. "Have you been waiting long?"

"No," Remus said, although he had stood there for nearly 20 minutes. "I just got here myself."

James grinned. He was standing so close that Remus could smell his thick scent.

"So," James said, still grinning. "How are you feeling about my proposition? Do you want to give us a try?"

Remus should say no.

"We could go on a few dates," James said. "And then we could discuss it again. See how we feel."

Remus was going to say no.

“I hope you’re willing to give me a chance,” James said eagerly.

“Yes.”

Remus immediately bit his lip, but it was too late; James’s face had already been taken over by his brightest smile yet.

How could someone look so damn happy over the idea of dating *Remus*?

“Yeah?” James said. “I’m glad. Thank you.”

“*Thank you?* You don’t need to thank me.”

James was going to hate him.

James’s grin was infectious, and Remus could feel the tugging on the corners of his mouth.

James would hate him.

“I’m happy,” James said. “Let’s go in, then, shall we? Let’s go tell them we’ll give it a try together.”

Remus could only nod.

They stepped into the telephone box, and Remus attached his visitor’s badge (*Remus Lupin, Mating*) to the front of his robes. James glanced at it, then froze. Wide-eyed, he stared at the badge. Remus could feel his cheeks steadily heating.

“Mating,” James mouthed the word, then burst into laughter.

Remus’s face must have been shining red at that point. James was laughing so hard that he had to lean on Remus as the telephone box slowly sank underground.

“Is that what it says?” James managed between giggles. “Who came up with that? Oh, Merlin, I want to meet them and shake their hand. That’s hilarious.”

The telephone box stopped its descent, but James was still laughing.

“Mating,” he wheezed as they walked towards the Atrium.

“It could say literally anything,” he chuckled as Remus waited for his wand to be registered.

“*Mating*,” he whispered to himself as they were crammed into a lift with several other people.

Remus couldn’t help smiling; James’s joy was contagious.

James had mainly calmed down by the time they made it to the Alpha Mating Registry’s door, but the sight of the plaque on the door set him off again. They stepped into the reception to the tune of his laughter.

Ms Wilkins was working again that day and looked at their entry with raised brows. James made a beeline for her and gave her a charming smile.

“Good morning,” he said.

Remus hovered behind him, unsure if he should step closer or keep a distance.

“Good morning,” Ms Wilkins said. Her smile went cold when she turned to look at Remus. “You can take a seat. Healer Hickinbottom will be with you in a moment.”

“Ah,” James said, and Ms Wilkins turned to him again. “I’m not sure how this works, exactly, but I’m assuming I should let you know that we’ve decided to see about possibly mating.”

Ms Wilkins’s eyes turned quickly to Remus, then back to James.

“You,” she said, her professional front disappearing completely as she stared at James with her mouth open. Then she caught herself and the polite smile was back. “Do you mean that you and... and Mr... Lupin are... The two of you wish to proceed together?”

“Yes,” James said. “I thought it would be at least polite to let you know, so you don’t need to worry about setting us up with anyone.”

Ms Wilkins blinked, then turned to look down at the paperwork she had on her desk.

“Yes,” she said. “I see, yes. Thank you for... for the information.”

She turned her head up and smiled at James, glanced at Remus, and then started writing something. James shrugged and pushed away from the reception desk.

“Let’s sit down, then,” he said.

Remus allowed himself to be led to the sitting area. This time, they sat right next to each other.

Remus bit his lip. Ms Wilkins hurried past them, knocked on Healer Hickinbottom’s door, waited, and went in. She must have gone to tell him that the werewolf had lured someone into its claws.

Remus glanced at James. James was frowning at Healer Hickinbottom’s door.

James was very warm. Their chairs were so close to each other that their thighs were pressed together, and Remus was embarrassed by how it made his cock twitch the moment he gave it too much thought. It was the most intimate contact he’d ever had, and he hoped that James didn’t notice anything in his scent or the way he breathed more heavily than usual. He also hoped that his face wasn’t as red as it felt.

“I almost regret saying anything,” James said quietly.

Remus turned to look at him. James had turned his attention to Remus, making Remus's heart skip a beat.

"It's none of their business if we decide to see each other," James said. "But I also just wanted to avoid having to seem interested in whoever they would try to pair me with."

Remus nodded, unsure about what to say. He was relieved that James had told them because it meant that they would pull James aside and tell him what a big mistake he was making.

Remus felt like a dirty liar.

"How come all Healers I deal with always end up being such jerks," James muttered to himself. "You'd think that you'd have to like people to want to heal them."

Remus snorted at that. It banished James's frown and brought a smile to his face. James leaned closer so that he was pressing up against Remus's arm.

"We should go out again today," James said. "Are you free after six?"

Remus nodded, the sudden physical closeness making him nervous, albeit happy.

"Sweet," James said with a pleased smile. "We should have dinner again. Do you think it's too early for you to brave my cooking?"

Remus's heart was hammering in his chest.

Was James implying what Remus thought he was?

And if he was, what did it mean that he was inviting Remus to his place? Did he only want to have dinner, or was he suggesting something that Remus didn't understand because he had no experience with dating?

"No need to look so scared," James said with a jovial chuckle. "I'm not that bad a cook."

James was watching Remus expectantly. Remus didn't know what he was supposed to say. Was he supposed to understand some double entendre?

"Hey," James said, his smile turning more serious. "If you feel like it's too early to visit my place, that's okay, too. We can go out."

"N-No," Remus said, finally finding his voice. "It's not... it's not too early. It's okay."

James's smile widened again. Remus wasn't sure what he had agreed to.

"Great!" James said. "Like I said—or implied, I guess—I'll get off work at six. Meet me at the Leaky Cauldron?"

Remus nodded, unable to find his voice again.

A door opened, and both of them turned to look. Ms Wilkins walked out of Healer Hickinbottom's office and headed back to the reception area. Soon, Healer Hickinbottom stepped into the corridor, eyes immediately fixating on Remus and James.

"Mr Potter," he said.

Remus glanced at James, who seemed surprised to be called in. He glanced back at Remus with raised eyebrows, gave a small shrug, and got up.

Remus swallowed as the door to Healer Hickinbottom's office closed.

That was that, then. Healer Hickinbottom was about to tell James about Remus, and the next time James walked out of Healer Hickinbottom's office, he was going to look at Remus in disgust. In anger over having been fooled by a werewolf.

Remus looked at the clock. 'Waiting,' it proclaimed. He still wished that there was a real clock in the Registry.

Remus didn't know how long it took before the door to Healer Hickinbottom's office opened, and James walked out. James wore a face of urgency and hurried towards Remus. He didn't seem angry, but maybe he was good at hiding his true feelings.

James sat down next to Remus and leaned very close.

"I'm so sorry, Remus," he whispered frantically. "I didn't mean to, I swear, but he was getting on my nerves—"

"Mr Lupin," Healer Hickinbottom's voice called.

Remus turned his eyes at him, then gave James a searching look, but couldn't decipher the desperation in his eyes. So, he stood up and followed Healer Hickinbottom into his office, the door clicking shut behind him like a verdict.

Healer Hickinbottom didn't even try to offer his hand to Remus, so Remus sat down on the rickety chair and waited.

"Mr Lupin," Healer Hickinbottom said, eyes intently searching Remus's face. "I hear you and Mr Potter have agreed on mating."

Remus barely kept his jaw from dropping. So that was what James had been trying to tell him.

"I must ask," Healer Hickinbottom said. "Did you in any way affect his decision? Did you blackmail him into it?"

Remus shook his head, eyes wide.

"Did you force him into it?"

Remus shook his head again.

“Did you make false promises to him?”

Remus shook his head again. “N-No.”

His voice was terribly wobbly. Healer Hickinbottom didn’t seem convinced, but sighed, crossing his hands on his desk.

“You are telling me,” he said darkly, “that he willingly agreed to mate with you with no coercion from yourself?”

“I—I didn’t force him into it.”

It wasn’t supposed to happen at all, he wanted to add, but didn’t.

Healer Hickinbottom frowned. He sighed again and turned to look at the parchment spread out on his desk. Remus’s heart was so heavy that he was sure it was about to stop beating completely.

“Very well,” Healer Hickinbottom said glumly. “You must be mated three weeks from now at the latest, with a strong, physical bond between the two of you. You can then register your relationship and will be exempt from our further services. If there are issues and you wish to utilise our services to find a mate, you must let us know immediately. Time is of the essence.”

Remus nodded. Healer Hickinbottom turned to a filing cabinet with a sigh, pulled out some pamphlets, and shoved them at Remus.

“There’s additional information on everything,” Healer Hickinbottom said. “At present, you are no longer our client because you were able to find a mate outside of our services, but you must still adhere to the guidelines.”

Remus nodded again. Healer Hickinbottom stared at him. He almost looked angry.

“You may leave,” he then said.

Remus nodded yet again, and after a moment’s hesitation, stood up. Healer Hickinbottom made no move to stand up himself, so Remus walked over to the door.

“Thank you,” he said, turning back to Healer Hickinbottom, who was still staring at him. “You’ve been very helpful, Healer Hickinbottom.”

Healer Hickinbottom’s expression darkened, and Remus took it as his cue to leave.

He stepped into the hallway and closed the door, carrying the pamphlets Healer Hickinbottom had given him, and turned towards the reception area. His eyes immediately met James’s, and for a moment, they only stared at each other.

What had they got themselves into?

Chapter End Notes

Good news, I have finally finished chapters 9 and 8 (in that order), and because I have also finished 3/4 fest fics I was working on, I can focus on this fic a bit more! Until I start working on new fests, that is.

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Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

James had not expected to be called in—he wasn't supposed to be there, after all. Hickinbottom shook his hand almost absentmindedly, then gestured towards the chair and sat down behind his desk.

“Mr Potter,” he said. “Edith tells me you have... that you have expressed interest in... in finding your own mate.”

James raised his brows.

“No,” he said. “I told her that Remus and I decided to see about mating. Together. To each other.”

“I see,” Hickinbottom said and stroked his chin. His eyes were searching. “And... was this decision made by... by which one of you?”

James bit his lip before answering so he wouldn't blurt out the first thing that came to mind. Feigning calmness, he said, “It was a mutual decision. Made by both of us together. As equal parties to the decision.”

Hickinbottom nodded and frowned, his eyes still measuring James.

“Yes,” he said, then took a moment to think, and James could already guess what he was about to say. “And... did Mr Lupin perhaps... promise you things? In exchange for... for mating with him?”

“No, he did not.”

“Right. And did he... threaten you with something?”

“No, he did not. It was my idea.”

“Ah, but Mr Potter,” Hickinbottom said, voice going silky. “Perhaps he made it appear that it was your own decision when, in reality, you were being manipulated into agreeing to something that—”

“I suggested it. He's the one who was hesitating. It was my idea. I asked him because I genuinely like him, and I think that's an important trait in a mate. I told him that I want to mate with him.”

Hickinbottom looked as if he was trying to open his mouth but someone had glued his lips shut.

“I suggested it,” James said, “and he said yes. We decided together, the two of us, both mutually decided to mate.”

“You,” Hickinbottom stuttered. “You have... Mr Potter, you see, choosing a mate is—”

“I have already chosen. I have chosen Remus as my mate. There’s nothing you can say to change my mind.”

Hickinbottom floundered for a moment but then nodded. “Quite. Right. You have... Mating...”

That was when James realised he had told Hickinbottom that he and Remus had already decided to mate, not that they were only thinking about it. There was no way he was going to take it back, though. Remus deserved better than the awful accusations of manipulation.

“You,” Hickinbottom said, seeming somewhat lost. “You have three weeks to register your relationship. You must be mated with a strong bond by then. You will no longer be considered our client unless you *change your mind*.”

The way he stressed *change your mind* made James hate him more.

“I won’t change my mind.”

“If you need help,” Hickinbottom said quickly and quietly. “If you’re in trouble at all, we will help you. You shouldn’t let someone like him talk you into—”

“I think,” James said, standing up, making sure that his posture was the picture of a spoilt pure-blood, “that as an Auror I am quite capable of taking care of myself. Do you think someone of Remus’s stature could force me into anything? Think again, Mr Hickinbottom.”

“Healer,” Hickinbottom mumbled but said nothing else.

“I’ll be taking my leave, then. We will return to register our mating post-haste.”

“Quite,” Hickinbottom muttered.

Before he could stand up to shake James’s hand as he seemed about to do, James turned, strode over to the door, and out into the corridor.

Remus immediately turned to look when the door opened, his expression that of worry and something else that James had no time to decipher. James hurried to sit down next to him; Hickinbottom was sure to want to speak to Remus next, and James had to warn him about his blunder.

“I’m so sorry, Remus,” he whispered. “I didn’t mean to, I swear, but he was getting on my nerves—”

“Mr Lupin,” James heard Hickinbottom’s voice from behind.

Remus glanced at Hickinbottom before giving James a look. He then stood up and followed Hickinbottom into his office.

James could only hope that Hickinbottom would go easy on Remus.

James groaned and slumped back in his chair. He was an idiot. He shouldn't have let Hickinbottom get to him, and he definitely shouldn't have said that he and Remus were going to mate when that was not what they had agreed.

He needed to apologise.

He glanced at the clock. 'Waiting,' it said.

How angry would Moody be if James went to work late so that he could immediately apologise to Remus properly? He had already missed some work the previous day, and he was already going to be staying late that day to make up for what he had missed. Moody was already irritated with him.

But he couldn't leave Remus without a proper explanation.

Even though there was no proper explanation, to begin with. The only explanation was that his sense of justice overrode his common sense, and having Hickinbottom outright accuse Remus of foul play was... it made James want to scream.

Hickinbottom was undoubtedly making the same accusations to Remus's face. How Remus had the patience to sit there and listen to people trample over him, James would never know.

Three weeks...

Had Remus always been so mild-mannered, or was that something he had only learned after he had been turned into a werewolf and figured out how much prejudice he was going to face? How long had Remus been a werewolf?

Speaking of which, Remus hadn't told James anything about his lycanthropy.

It seemed impolite not to share something so big when they had been talking about mating, although James supposed he could understand why; it wouldn't be fun for Remus to have to tell people about himself and risk getting a violent reaction.

Remus was probably going to tell James later. Now that James had messed up and they only had three weeks to bond, Remus was going to tell him soon.

Three weeks to form a strong bond...

It took time for the bond to become strong. It took, in fact, closer to three weeks of regular scenting after the initial mating.

James frowned. Why were they expected to mate immediately?

Because he had told them they were going to do just that.

James sighed and stared at the ceiling.

Remus was probably telling Hickinbottom that they were going to do no such thing. Remus seemed like someone who knew what to say to get out of trouble. He was going to talk to Hickinbottom and—

The door to Hickinbottom's office opened, and Remus stepped into the corridor. His eyes were wide, and he was holding a stack of parchment in his hand. Slowly, he made his way to James.

"Did he not give you pamphlets?" Remus asked in a weak voice.

James only shook his head.

For a moment, they remained still, both staring at each other. The deep brown of Remus's eyes was very beautiful, James noted.

Then Remus turned his eyes away. He looked at the clock before turning his attention to James, but didn't look him in the eye. He was squeezing the pamphlets so hard that the parchment crinkled.

"I need to go to work," he said before James could say anything.

James glanced at the clock, too. 'Going to work,' it said, and who was James to argue with that?

"I need to go to work too," he said. "But we'll see at six, right?"

Remus nodded almost imperceptibly. He then headed to the door, and James hurried to follow. They walked to the lifts in uneasy silence.

"I'm headed up," James then said. "We'll talk later, yeah?"

Remus nodded.

"Have a good day at work," James said, but couldn't quite find his usual level of enthusiasm.

Remus mumbled a response when James stepped into a lift. He was still not looking at James. It felt wrong to leave Remus like that, but before James could make radical decisions, the door to the lift slid shut, hiding Remus from view.

James was distracted all day, so it was probably a good thing that he only had paperwork—even though paperwork also meant that he was more easily distracted.

He couldn't stop thinking about Remus. He couldn't stop thinking about his own mistake. He couldn't stop worrying that Remus wouldn't show up at the Leaky Cauldron.

He couldn't stop worrying about the fact that if he didn't want to go back to Hickinbottom, he needed to mate with Remus within a couple of days so that their bond would have settled by

the time they were required to register the relationship.

Why were they given such little time? If they hadn't met at all, the process would have taken much longer, as they would have needed to meet new people. Why couldn't they be given more time to bond?

And then, of course, there was the question of Remus's lycanthropy. Hickinbottom had been useless in that regard, and James had to confess that he was getting nervous about the thought of mating with a werewolf. When he had told Hickinbottom that he was willing to mate with a Dark creature, he hadn't thought it through; he had simply got irritated with Hickinbottom's attitude and the assumption that he was going to say no. He hadn't thought that it might end with him actually mating with a Dark creature.

It shouldn't matter. It shouldn't matter to him at all, and the fact that it did annoyed him. Werewolves were normal people most of the time. James may not have been an expert, but he thought it likely that there would be nothing drastically out of the ordinary about mating with a werewolf; Hickinbottom was just a biased jerk who wanted to believe that there would be something unusual about it.

Still, there might be minor differences. Remus would know, so James would simply ask him about it. Even if it turned out that Remus had never been mated before, James was sure that any differences would have become apparent during sex. And Remus must have noticed the difference between before and after he had been bitten.

When had Remus been bitten? How long had he been a werewolf? Considering his meek behaviour, it might not have been very recent since he had already learned not to cause conflict if he could avoid it. Or maybe it was the exact opposite; maybe he had been bitten only very recently and was still cautious about it.

Maybe it didn't matter even if they mated immediately. They could still date and get to know each other at their own pace—they would simply be mated already. Matings weren't permanent, bonds could be broken, so what harm did it do even if they did mate?

James felt better after this revelation, and he hoped Remus would view it the same way.

James was sure that he would end up having to redo a lot of his work, but he couldn't keep his thoughts on anything other than the approaching date with Remus. Once his workday was over, he Apparated to the Leaky Cauldron immediately, worried that Remus wouldn't show up. He needn't have worried, however, as Remus was already there, wearing Muggle clothes and looking very cute.

"Hi," James said, voice embarrassingly airy.

"Hello," Remus said and smiled, although it was hesitant—as was his scent.

James wanted to apologise for his slip-up because it was his fault that they were in a mess. Even though bonds could be easily broken, he had still made it difficult for Remus not to agree to a mating with him before they'd had the chance to get to know each other.

“Shall we go?” James asked. “Are you still okay with going to my place?”

Remus nodded. He was carrying his jacket rather than wearing it, so James assumed he had been waiting a while.

“Let’s take the Floo,” James said.

Remus nodded, then followed James to the Floo and nodded again when James told him his Floo address.

“See you there,” James said, trying to smile but coming up short.

He wasn’t sure if he was nervous because he was going on a date or because he knew that the date was supposed to lead to a mating sooner rather than later. He turned to the Floo and travelled home, stepping out of his fireplace and waiting for Remus to follow. He looked around the sitting room, making sure he hadn’t forgotten to clean up anything embarrassing, and then flicked his wand at the empty coffee cup that was still sitting on the coffee table, sending it to the kitchen where it clattered as it landed in the sink. James grimaced.

He had no time to think about the fate of his coffee cup, as the Floo flared green and Remus stepped out of it, brushing his shirt with his hand.

“Welcome,” James said and smiled, and this time, it felt more natural.

Remus responded with a shy smile of his own, and James’s heart skipped a beat. Remus was charming.

“Let me take your jacket,” James said as he took off his own cloak. “I’ll hang it up for you.”

Remus handed his jacket to James, who took it and his cloak to the hall where he hung them up. When he returned to the sitting room, Remus was still standing in the same spot, although he had taken his shoes off.

“You’re probably hungry,” James said. “I should get right to cooking.”

Remus looked hesitant and James stopped to see what it was about. Remus cleared his throat.

“Would you like some help?” he asked.

James beamed at him. “That would be nice. The kitchen is this way.”

James turned towards the kitchen. Remus hesitated for a moment, then followed.

“How do you feel about curry?” James asked.

“I like curry.”

Remus was soft-spoken, which shouldn’t have surprised James, but did. He had thought that being in a private place with only him around might help Remus be more confident, and he had possibly hoped that he would get to see Remus’s more assertive side again. It appeared,

however, that rather than only keeping up a mild-mannered front in public, Remus was genuinely shy.

When James thought about it, there had been signs; he had simply ignored them the previous night as he had lain in bed, thinking about the way Remus's eyes had felt on him as Remus had straightened his posture and been unapologetically himself.

They would get there again, James was certain.

Together, they got to work, and James found he enjoyed Remus's company, even when Remus was quiet. He struck up a conversation about Remus's job, and Remus talked to him about his life as a librarian and some of the most recent books he had read. James didn't know much about Muggle literature—or wizarding literature, for that matter—so he couldn't contribute much, but he decided he would try to read a bit more to have something he could share with Remus.

After some hesitation, Remus asked James about his Quidditch career in school, and James delved into a story after a story about his time on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

They sat down to eat, continuing their conversation about Hogwarts. James had worried that bringing up school might be insensitive to Remus, but he seemed interested in hearing about it. James also tried asking him a bit more about his homeschooling, but it seemed to be a subject Remus wasn't keen on, so he allowed the conversation to move back to Hogwarts.

They were nearly finished with their meal and Remus had relaxed a lot, so James decided it was time to talk.

"We should talk about the mating," he said. "But first, I want to apologise."

Remus looked at him with questioning eyes. It made James suspect that people rarely apologised to him.

"I know we discussed mating as an option," James said, "and I'm sorry I lost my temper and gave Hickinbottom the impression that we had already agreed to mate for certain. If you have doubts, I will go back there and tell them it was my mistake, and they can make you a list of other candidates."

"There won't be a list," Remus said very quietly.

"What?"

"They won't have a list for me. They..."

Remus went quiet. James squeezed his fork so hard his knuckles were going white, and he forced himself to loosen his hold.

"They told you everything about me, didn't they?" Remus then whispered.

His eyes were turned down. James badly wanted to see his face.

“They told me something about you, yes,” James said. “But they... they weren’t planning on matching us together, so no, they didn’t tell me everything about you. That’s something you’ll have to do on your own.”

Remus’s brow furrowed, and he placed his fork on his plate. He lowered his hand to his lap so that both of them were hidden from view, but James had already seen that it was shaking.

As much as James wanted to hear Remus say it, tell it to him directly, he hated seeing Remus in such distress. It was quickly seeping into his scent, too.

“They did tell me an important detail about you,” James said. “They... in fact, they didn’t tell me. I inferred it from what was said. And I might be mistaken, so I’m going to have to ask you.”

Remus seemed to close his eyes, but James couldn’t be certain, as his head was turned just so.

“Are you—are you a werewolf?” James asked.

Remus’s nod was almost imperceptible, but it was there.

“Yes, that’s what I thought,” James said.

Remus turned his head a bit to glance at him. James found himself exhausted.

Remus revealing that he was a werewolf shouldn’t have mattered because James had as good as known it, but it appeared that getting first-hand information still got to him. He wasn’t even sure what it was that he felt; it was a mixture of different things, worry being one of them.

“I have some questions I want to ask,” James said.

Remus nodded, still trying to appear as small as possible. As much as James wanted to tell Remus that he didn’t much care about the lycanthropy, he also had a feeling that Remus wouldn’t believe him. It might be better to move on and hope that it was enough to show Remus that he really didn’t care.

“Have you ever mated before?” James asked.

Remus shook his head.

“Do you know if lycanthropy will have an effect on mating?” James asked.

Remus shook his head again.

James wished that he would say something. He wanted to have a conversation.

“Right,” he said and thought for a moment. “Do you have any friends who might know?”

Remus shook his head yet again. It was getting frustrating. James took a deep breath to keep himself from sighing.

“Well,” he said then. “If we decide to go ahead with the mating, we don’t have much time to wait. Since our bond needs to be solid in three weeks, we need to perform the initial mating in a few days’ time.”

Remus finally turned his head to properly look at James. He seemed baffled by something, and James waited.

“Are you...” Remus asked, slow and quiet. “Are you...”

Remus went quiet for a long time, but James thought he needed the time to think, so he remained quiet as well.

“You’re quite certain,” Remus finally continued, “that you want to... with me?”

“Yes,” James said. “Is there a reason you doubt it?”

Remus seemed to shrink into himself even more.

“I don’t understand why you would,” he said.

“Because you seem like a person I’d want to mate with.”

Remus looked up in surprise.

“You’re fun to talk to,” James said. “You’re kind and good-looking, and your pheromones drive me a little crazy. I’ve never met anyone like you.”

Remus blinked and said nothing.

“How about you?” James asked. “Do you want to mate with me? It’s not too late to change your mind. And it’s not like mating is permanent, so you can change your mind later, as well.”

Remus hesitated for a long time, but then nodded.

James grinned. “Great! When would you like to do it? For us to have a strong bond three weeks from now, it would have to be within the next two or three days.”

Remus was quiet for a long time, but James wasn’t about to answer the question for him because it was important that it was a decision Remus made himself.

Finally, Remus said, “Could we do it tomorrow? I don’t think I can take the... anticipation for any longer than that.”

“Sure. It’s quick enough but gives us some time to think, still.”

Remus nodded. He was biting his lip.

James wished that Remus didn't have his hands hidden, as it would have been the perfect moment for some hand-holding, but it would lose its spontaneity if he had to ask for Remus's hand.

"How would you feel about kissing today?" James then asked, unable to stop grinning.

He could smell how flustered the question made Remus, and it delighted him. Remus was cute, but he was also distinctly an alpha, and James was glad that he had already seen both sides of him. Maybe, after they had been bonded for a while and knew each other better, Remus would relax and allow his alpha side to show again.

"That's fine," Remus mumbled and glanced at James.

His cheeks were red.

It was very cute.

"But first, dessert," James said. "I have some ice cream. I forgot about dessert, to be honest."

"Ice cream's fine."

Remus smiled tentatively. James smiled back at him, then took their plates into the kitchen and soon returned with the ice cream and two bowls. Remus perked up when he noticed it was chocolate.

James wondered if there were times of the month when Remus couldn't have chocolate; surely he would be unable to eat it in wolf form, at least. James didn't ask, as that seemed rude, and he didn't want to bring up the whole lycanthropy thing again because Remus had started to relax a bit.

They had their ice cream mostly in silence, but it didn't feel awkward to James. He hoped it didn't feel awkward to Remus either. It was amazing that James could find comfort in silence. He was used to things getting loud, he was used to Harry's constant chatter, and he was used to Sirius's long-winded tirades, but with Remus, the silence didn't become oppressive. Remus seemed like a calm person in general—maybe that did it?

When they finished the ice cream, James sent the bowls into the kitchen before turning to Remus. Remus had a bit of chocolate stuck to the corner of his mouth, and James smiled at it. He wanted to lick it away, and that thought surprised him. As much as he had already known that Remus allured him, he hadn't realised that it was such a strong want.

"So," James said. "Want to move this to the sofa?"

Remus nodded, and they got up. His cheeks were red as James led him to the sofa, where they sat down. Remus left a considerable distance between them, but James shuffled a bit closer. Remus was toying with his fingers, and James reached out to stop him and take hold of one of his hands; it was trembling slightly.

"Is this okay?" James asked.

Remus nodded, not looking at James. James wondered when he'd last been in a relationship to be so nervous over holding hands. Who knew, maybe James's initial theory of Remus having relatively recently lost a mate was correct and he felt as if he shouldn't be with someone else. But surely that was something Remus would have told him.

Remus hadn't been very forthcoming about his lycanthropy, though.

But it was different. It was completely different to tell someone that you were a werewolf than to tell someone that you were still hung up on your previous partner, especially because they were discussing mating. James had heard that mating with someone while you still wanted to be with someone else was often a cause for anxiety and panic.

Should James ask? Was it rude to ask? It couldn't be that rude, could it? Wasn't it an expression of concern over Remus's well-being?

Then James remembered Remus had told him he had never been mated before, so the theory went out the window. That didn't mean he couldn't be hung up on someone else, though; it simply meant that they had never made it to the bonding stages of their relationship.

"Can I kiss you?" James asked.

"Yes," Remus said, voice barely audible.

James was a bit surprised Remus hadn't hesitated more. He shuffled closer to Remus, who was watching him. Remus seemed nervous, but the tremble in his hand hadn't got worse and his scent didn't have any sudden changes in it, either, so James supposed it wasn't anything but the usual nerves of getting close to someone new. James pulled Remus closer and pressed their lips together into a kiss.

Everything about Remus's kiss was tentative from the way he held himself stiffly and couldn't seem to decide where to put his free hand to the way his lips moved clumsily. He still smelled awfully nervous, and James didn't try to deepen the kiss as quickly as he otherwise would have. He squeezed Remus's hand a bit, then placed his free hand on his shoulder. He gently nipped on Remus's lower lip, kissing him slowly until Remus's shoulders relaxed. Remus still hadn't figured out where to put his hand.

James licked over Remus's lips, seeking entry, but it took a moment before Remus understood what he wanted. If James didn't know better, he would have assumed it was Remus's first kiss. At the very least, it had to be his first in quite a while. He finally rested his hand on James's waist as he parted his lips. James moved his hand to Remus's cheek. His skin was hot under James's touch.

Remus's hand on James's waist was big and hesitant, and James thought about how good it would feel once Remus lost the nerves and his hand would be bold instead, roaming over James's body. He quietly moaned into the kiss, and Remus let out a small gasp.

Remus was very cute.

And he smelled amazing. The kissing had awakened his pheromones that were making James's heart beat faster. He wanted to pull away from the kiss and lick over Remus's scent glands instead, nip at the skin and then press his own scent gland against it. James pulled away to give himself a bit of distance to the pheromones.

Remus was panting lightly. His eyes were still closed and his lips were parted, shiny with saliva, and he looked delectable. James wanted to devour him.

"Good?" James asked, slightly out of breath himself.

Remus nodded and opened his eyes. They were shining in a new way, and James had no idea what it meant, just that he wanted to see it more often. He wanted it to become Remus's regular look.

"Tomorrow," James said. "Should we go have dinner together?"

Remus bit his lip, which drew James's eyes to it. He wanted to kiss Remus again.

"No to dinner?" he asked when Remus remained quiet.

"I'm worried I'll be too nervous to eat."

"That's okay. We could have dinner here again, so if you're too nervous before the mating, at least you could get something to eat afterwards?"

Remus chewed on his lip, and James wanted to stop it by kissing him.

"That sounds okay," Remus finally said.

James smiled at him. "What time do you get off work? I have the morning shift, so I'll be out by three."

"I get off at five."

"Cool. I'll cook while I wait."

"I don't want you to go to any trouble—"

"It's no trouble. I need to cook for myself, anyway. It's no trouble to cook for two instead of one."

Remus nodded.

"Now," James said, shuffling closer, "can I kiss you again?"

Remus nodded, and there was a small smile playing on his lips. James pulled him into a kiss, and they spent the next moments kissing each other. Remus relaxed considerably, but his hand, sadly, never turned bolder.

Once Remus had left, the flat felt empty. James couldn't remember the last time he had felt so alone at home, so he went to the Floo, threw in some Floo Powder, and called Sirius.

"Sirius!" he yelled into the dark sitting room. "Are you home?"

"Just a minute," came a faint response from somewhere in the house.

James huffed in annoyance, waiting for Sirius to show up. His knees were getting too old to spend ages kneeling on the floor. He should buy a nice pillow to kneel on.

He was then momentarily distracted by the thought of what else he could do while kneeling, and was only pulled out of his daydreams by the room suddenly lighting up and Sirius striding into view.

"Oh," he said when he spotted James in the Floo. "I thought you had come through. What are you doing with your head in the fireplace?"

"I... don't know. I thought I'd just quickly call you."

"Come through. Let's have a chat! It's been too long."

"It's been two days."

"Entirely too long!"

James rolled his eyes and shook his head, but did as Sirius instructed, and was soon sitting next to him on the sofa.

"What did you want to talk about?" Sirius asked.

"Well," James said. "I suppose I'll have to start from the Alpha Mating Registry."

"That's right. How did that go?"

James told him everything about the Registry and their opinion on his situation, then told him about meeting Remus and immediately feeling a connection. Then, after a moment of uncharacteristic hesitation that Sirius immediately pointed out, James also told him that he had accidentally implied that he and Remus had decided to mate, which had led them to actually having to mate.

"What do you mean you have to mate with him?" Sirius asked. "Just go back and tell them it was a mistake."

"Yes, well, about that. There's... Remus is... You wouldn't happen to know anything about werewolves mating, would you?"

"Excuse me?"

"Would you happen to know if there's anything unusual about werewolves mating with someone?" James repeated, enunciating each word carefully.

“Are you saying that you’re thinking of mating with a werewolf?”

“I was asking if you knew anything about werewolf mating. But now I’m also saying I’m not only thinking of mating with a werewolf, but I am going to mate with a werewolf for certain.”

“Is that smart?”

James glared at him.

“I’m just saying,” Sirius said. “I don’t know anything about werewolf mating, and it sounds like you don’t either.”

“Oh, well,” James said and shrugged, even though he didn’t feel quite that confident on the inside. “I’m going to do it, anyway.”

“Why are you so adamant about it?”

And James told him everything that had happened with the Registry and Hickinbottom.

Chapter End Notes

I did the final edits to this chapter on the Office app on my phone and I don't 100% trust it to actually save all the changes, so I'm just sincerely hoping it did save them.

This chapter is actually the reason I stopped writing this fic for a while because I had no idea where I was supposed to go with it. I had to delete and rewrite their dinner conversation before everything started making sense again.

In other news, I have finished writing chapter 10 and started chapter 11, so everything's looking pretty good currently, even though I'm still not entirely sure where this fic is going haha

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Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus was restless. He couldn't sleep, and he kept tossing and turning in bed. He couldn't stop thinking about James and the kiss they had shared. His first kiss. It had been amazing, perfect apart from his own awkwardness, and he could only hope that James hadn't realised it had been his first kiss because that would be way too embarrassing.

Remus didn't want James to know that he was far more inexperienced than never having been bonded implied. He wondered if that was a bad thing to do, not telling him. He didn't know how the mating would work, but there was no way he was going to explain it to James. He would simply go with the flow and hope that his nerves didn't take over.

He was nervous already; that was why he couldn't sleep. He was almost certain that mating required sex, which meant that he was going to sleep with James, and his first time having sex would also be his first time mating with someone. That wasn't how things usually went.

He was too strange. He should tell James that they should call it off, and allow him to find someone else—someone less complicated and more human. He should tell James that it had all been a mistake and they should go their separate ways.

Not that it would help him with the Registry. He would have to return and admit that his attempt at finding a mate by himself hadn't worked out, and then he would sit there all day, waiting on a creaky chair until Healer Hickinbottom had time for him again, and then they would tell him that he was a hopeless case and they couldn't find him a mate, no matter how hard they tried.

What then?

Remus didn't know.

What he did know was that James was an outstanding person, willing to even consider mating with him. James was kind and thoughtful, and Remus couldn't take advantage of it.

Mind made up, Remus finally fell asleep, but when he woke up, he was just as tired as he had been before sleeping. He had an odd type of anxiety crawling in his gut, and he couldn't tell what caused it until much later that day, when he was on a coffee break at work and realised that he didn't want to let James go.

For once in his life, there was someone who wanted to be with him, even if they had only known each other for a couple of days. Even if they had been all but forced into it, James still wanted to try with Remus, no matter the lycanthropy. Would Remus ever find someone else who was willing to even consider him? No, he wouldn't, because otherwise, it would have already happened; he would have already managed to form a relationship with someone.

The anxiety was still churning in him when he left work and headed to the Leaky Cauldron. James had told him to Floo in, and the idea of simply appearing in James's sitting room made him even more nervous.

Something he had forbidden himself to think about was how big a flat James lived in. It meant that he had quite a bit of money, especially when one also considered the furniture that seemed brand new; every piece of furniture must have been enchanted with anti-wear spells, and that was expensive.

It seemed to Remus that James was bringing everything to the relationship while he was bringing nothing but trouble.

Remus stepped out of James's Floo and stopped. He should make his presence known, but couldn't bring himself to do so. In fact, he wasn't even certain his voice would work. He stood there feeling stupid and waited in trepidation for his body to start taking orders from him again.

A part of him was less nervous than he had been the previous day, but another part was more nervous. He already knew that James was nice, but he also knew that they were going to be mating.

Remus couldn't decide whether he should tell James they shouldn't do it or to go ahead with it. He couldn't decide.

James peeked into the sitting room.

"Hello," he said and smiled. "I thought I heard the Floo. I'm glad you could make it."

Remus wondered if James had been uncertain whether he was going to show up.

"Come in," James said, stepping closer and waving his arm in invitation.

Remus stepped forward, the anxiety getting stronger. He could smell food, but he didn't think he could eat, no matter how hungry he had been only a moment ago.

"Hello," he said, feeling silly and small.

James smiled. "Let me take your jacket."

Remus took off his jacket and handed it to James, who went to hang it up while Remus took off his shoes and placed them in the shoe rack next to the fireplace.

"Would you like to eat?" James asked as he returned.

Remus shook his head and bit his lip. He was starting to worry he might throw up.

"In that case, I think we should discuss what we're about to do," James said. "Shall we sit down first? I don't want it to seem like I'm just dragging you into bed with me."

Remus nodded, followed James to the sofa, and sat down. He could feel how stiff he was, but couldn't force himself to relax. James sat down right next to him and leaned in to kiss him on the corner of his mouth. Remus wondered if he would have wanted to kiss him on the lips. Should he have kissed James upon arrival? He didn't know how relationships worked.

"So," James said. "Do you still agree that we should mate today?"

Remus nodded, although he wasn't sure at all. He should let James go, let him find someone better; yet he couldn't stop thinking about how nice James made him feel and how he wouldn't mind feeling that nice more often. Maybe he could learn to make James feel like that, too.

"I'm sure you know how mating works in theory," James said. "We should discuss how we want to do it. Since you've never mated before, I think we should have sex. That makes it hurt less and is also more fun."

"So it does hurt?"

"A bit. I mean, you are having someone bite you and break skin."

"Right." Remus nodded.

James was looking at him expectantly, and Remus wondered what he wanted. He also wondered how he would know where to bite exactly. He knew it happened over either scent gland on the neck, but what if he missed the right spot and the mating was incomplete because of him, or what if it hurt more if he didn't bite the exact spot?

"You don't need to be nervous," James said. "Just follow your instincts and they will tell you what to do. You can't do it wrong."

But what if Remus's instincts worked differently from humans? What if his instincts told him what to do, and it was wrong? What if—

"So," James said. "Do you agree we should do it while having sex? I know it's fast, but it's not much different from having a one-night stand with someone you've only just met."

He laughed, and Remus forced himself to chuckle as well. If he was honest, he was more nervous about the mating than the sex. He had never done it before, but he could guess, and he was reasonably certain that he would know how to give at least an adequate handjob. But he couldn't guess mating, and the risk of making a mistake seemed too high.

"You seem uncomfortable," James said.

Remus swallowed. "I'm a bit worried. I've never... done it before, so..."

"It's okay. I have done it before, so I know what's supposed to happen. If you don't have the correct instincts for some reason or you're too nervous to follow them, I can tell you. You can't do it wrong."

Remus wanted to argue because there had to be a way to do it wrong, but he kept his mouth shut. If James said that there was no way of doing it wrong, shouldn't he listen to that? James was the one of them who knew what to do and who had done it before—Remus didn't know anything.

"Is there anything else you're nervous about?" James asked. "Are you maybe not the type to have sex on the first date?"

Remus shrugged. The smile on James's face went softer.

"That's okay," he said. "We could still postpone it by a couple of days if you're uncertain. And I'm sure if I go to the Registry and talk to them, we could get more time to bond. I'm sure they only gave us such a tight schedule because they think I won't go through with it."

"But you are." Remus couldn't quite hide the wonder in his voice. "You're going to go through with it."

James nodded. "So, if it makes you more comfortable, we can wait. And I'll go talk to them tomorrow. You don't need to come with me, I'm sure you've had quite enough of the Registry."

Remus gave it a moment's thought, then shook his head. "I want to do it now. I'll just keep being nervous otherwise."

"If you're sure."

"I'm sure."

James nodded. Remus tried to force himself to relax, but his body wouldn't listen, and his muscles remained stiff.

"So," James said. "Do you want to take this to the bed? Or we could do it here if you want to keep it more casual. I think the bed might be nicer for your first time."

Remus nodded. He was almost certain James hadn't understood that when Remus said it was his first time, he wasn't only talking about the mating, but he didn't mind imagining that James knew what he had really meant and was being thoughtful of it.

James leaned closer and gently turned Remus's head towards him.

"Hey," he said, voice soft and low. "You don't need to be nervous."

His fingertips were resting on Remus's jaw, and Remus could feel his cheeks warm. Kissing James had been nice, and if he wasn't badly mistaken, James was about to kiss him again. James gave him one last look, then leaned in and pressed his lips onto Remus's. Remus closed his eyes and tried to remember how he had relaxed the previous day. He didn't want James to think that kissing him would always be so difficult.

"You're thinking too much," James mumbled against Remus's lips. "Let yourself go."

It was easier said than done, but Remus did his best. James seemed to be melting into the kiss, and Remus wondered if he could ever achieve the same. His lips still felt as clumsy as they had the previous day, and he was sure that James was about to figure out that he had never kissed anyone else before.

James pulled back and smiled. Remus tried to smile, too, but it felt more like a grimace.

“Want to take this to the bedroom?” James asked, voice low and husky. “You might find it easier to relax.”

Remus swallowed and nodded. Before he could do anything else, James had already got up and offered him a hand. Remus hesitated only for a moment before taking the hand and allowing James to pull him up and along towards what he assumed was James’s bedroom. And it was.

Remus was too nervous to take in the room, so he was mainly left with the impression of it being bigger than his entire flat. He followed James to the bed and sat down next to him. James didn’t let go of his hand. It was nice. Remus had always wondered what it would be like to hold hands with someone.

James pulled Remus into a kiss again, then kept pulling until they were lying down and Remus was on top of James. It made Remus’s stomach swoop uncomfortably; he didn’t want to have to be in charge. He couldn’t be in charge because he didn’t know what he was doing.

“Relax,” James murmured against Remus’s lips, his hands stroking Remus’s arms and then wandering over his back. “Don’t think so much.”

Remus couldn’t stop worrying, and his body was stiff against James’s supple form. His lips had turned clumsier, and it didn’t take long for James to break the kiss and roll them to their sides. When Remus opened his eyes, James was watching him with a grave expression.

“Hey,” he said. “I don’t think you’re ready for this.”

Remus shook his head. “I want it. I’m just nervous.”

James’s face softened. “I understand that. And I really think we should wait longer before going ahead with it.”

Remus shook his head again. “I want to do it now. Please.”

“You’re not only going ahead with this because you think the Registry wouldn’t find you anyone else, are you?”

“No.” Remus sighed, unable to meet James’s eyes. “They would find someone for me. It’s... You can’t possibly be the only person in the world who would bond with a werewolf.”

“I just don’t want you to mate with me because you think I’m your only option.”

“It’s not that. I... I like you.”

James looked at Remus for a long time before nodding. His mouth was a thin line and there was a worried crease on his forehead.

“All right,” James then said. “But if you want to stop for any reason at all, tell me.”

Remus nodded. James’s face lightened up.

“I like you too,” he said. “And you don’t need to worry so much about kissing. It doesn’t lead to mating.”

Remus didn’t know what else to do except nod again. There was something tight in his stomach, something that was making him queasy.

“Come here, then,” James said, pulling Remus closer for yet another kiss.

Now that Remus wasn’t on top of James, he found it easier to enjoy the kiss. James’s lips were soft, and his tongue was wet, and his hands against Remus were sure and warm. He pushed Remus onto his back, positioning himself over him, and Remus could almost melt into the bed. The knot in his stomach loosened some, and James hummed into their kiss as he ran his hand over Remus’s side and down to his hip. No one had ever touched Remus that way, and a lot of his nervousness gave way to anticipation.

He was about to have sex.

He had never thought he would get to have sex with someone, and there he was, lying under a gorgeous man who wanted him—who was touching him in ways he had only ever fantasised about.

James broke the kiss and pressed his nose into the crook of Remus’s neck, inhaling deeply. It brought his own scent gland closer to Remus’s nose, and Remus swallowed as he smelled James’s distinct scent.

“You smell so good,” James muttered and pressed small kisses over Remus’s scent gland.

“You too.”

James hummed and nuzzled against the gland, his touch causing it to secrete even more. Remus could feel it. He hadn’t known it was possible, and he shivered as James sighed happily, pressing a kiss against the gland before using his teeth to tease the skin. Remus moaned, smelling James’s scent around them. His trousers were becoming too tight, and he wanted James to touch him, he wanted James to bite him, to mark him, to claim him. And he wanted to do the same to James.

It was probably what James had meant by instincts. There was a specific spot on James’s neck that seemed more enticing than any other spot, and it had to be the spot for a mating bite.

Remus’s thoughts were momentarily diverted by James pressing his erection against his hip. Remus pushed up against it to better feel it, and James moaned.

“I want you,” James said, rolling his hips.

Remus said nothing, but he rolled his hips too, pressing his cock against James’s thigh and eliciting a moan from him. James’s nose was still pressed against Remus’s scent gland as his hand made its way to Remus’s waistband. Remus shifted his head enough to better smell James, whose scent gland was going as wild as Remus’s. Their scents were surrounding them and mingling in the air, and Remus’s heart skipped a beat as he thought about the fact that it would be their bond scent.

“Can I?” James asked, hand on Remus’s flies.

“Yes,” Remus gasped, hiding his face in the crook of James’s neck.

James opened Remus’s trousers and pushed them down his hips, his hand then finding Remus’s cock and teasing it over the fabric of his pants. Remus let out an embarrassingly loud moan, squeezing his eyes shut as he told himself not to get too excited; he shouldn’t come yet. He couldn’t come yet.

“Oh, fuck,” James said, then started pulling off Remus’s pants.

Remus’s nerves were back as he lay there with his cock exposed. James was too busy struggling with his own robes to notice, which was good; Remus didn’t want him to stop. He focused on breathing in James’s scent that was so thick Remus could taste it.

“This okay?” James asked as he lined up their cocks and took them in his slick hand.

“Yes,” Remus breathed, heart beating heavily and his thoughts divided between James’s enticing scent and his cock sliding against Remus’s, his hand on their cocks, stroking them together.

Remus opened his mouth to press his teeth into James’s skin, only realising he had done so when James chuckled.

“Not yet,” James said, stroking harder. “Soon.”

Remus experimentally rolled his hips into James’s hand, and James moaned. Remus could feel his cock twitch against his own, and it was surreal that he was having sex, that someone was touching him.

“You’re so sexy,” James muttered against Remus’s neck. “Fuck, I’m close.”

Remus was glad to hear that because he was close as well and had already wondered if he was going to embarrass himself by coming prematurely. It also made him feel warm to be called sexy by someone as handsome as James, and that warmth pooled in his stomach with the pleasure of being touched. Remus swallowed, his teeth aching to press into James’s skin again, but he waited.

James moaned and his scent spiked, leaving no doubt in Remus’s mind that the right moment had come. He sank his teeth into James’s neck, biting down hard as James spilled over

Remus's stomach with a moan. Remus reached his peak as well, coming apart in James's arms, and he hardly even felt the sting of his skin breaking as James bit him.

Remus was overwhelmed by the pleasure, their mingled scents, and the urge to keep licking the bite mark on James's neck. He gave in to the instinct that told him licking the mark was important, and felt James do the same. James was still holding their softening cocks in his hand, seeming completely focused on licking Remus's mating mark clean. He finished by pressing a soft kiss onto the skin that was starting to smart, then let go of their cocks and rolled aside when Remus finished licking his mark.

Remus opened his eyes to face James, who was beaming. Remus couldn't help smiling as well.

"Hi," James said, reaching out to stroke Remus's hair. "That was nice, even if it didn't go exactly as I had planned."

"What had you planned?"

"I was going to undress you slowly and explore your body. But well. Next time."

Next time. The idea of a next time made Remus's heart stutter, and he wasn't sure it was entirely positive. He had refused to think too much about it beforehand, but the fact of the matter was that he hadn't been keen on James seeing all his scars. He was actually quite relieved that they had kept most of their clothes on.

James found his wand and cleaned them up. Remus pulled his pants and trousers on, feeling suddenly self-conscious. James was still watching him, and his cheeks grew warm.

"Everything okay?" James asked.

Remus nodded.

"Do you need anything?"

Remus thought for a moment, then glanced at James.

"Could I have some water?" he asked.

"I'll get you a glass."

James kissed Remus's cheek before getting up and heading out of the room, and Remus allowed himself to succumb to the emotions that were pushing against his hastily constructed calmness. He pressed a hand over his eyes, as if it would stop them from tearing up.

He felt stupid, crying after sex, even if it had been his first time and they had mated and it was all a bit overwhelming. He sniffled, hoping that James would take his time with the water. His neck stung.

"Here you go," James said as he returned way too soon.

Remus was still hiding behind his hand. He could hear James place a glass on the nightstand before he got back in bed and settled next to Remus.

“It’s okay,” James said, voice soft. “Mating releases a cocktail of hormones. I was in a delicate state after my first mating. I get it.”

Remus wondered if that was it. Maybe he was crying because of the hormones and not because he was overly sensitive.

James placed a hand on Remus’s shoulder, and while its weight was reassuring, it didn’t stop Remus from feeling silly; his cheeks were burning with shame.

“You should have a bit of water,” James said. “It will help.”

Remus took a deep breath, then pulled his hand away, wiping his eyes as he did. He couldn’t look at James, but he felt James’s eyes on him, watching him sit up. He took the glass and sipped the water.

“We’re going to have to scent each other every day for about a week,” James said. “After that, it should be fine to do it every few days or so.”

Remus nodded, still unable to look at James.

“Do you want to keep coming here?” James asked. “I could come to your place, too.”

“Here is fine,” Remus muttered.

He didn’t think he was ready to show James where he lived. He sipped his water, slowly draining the glass.

“Do you want to cuddle?” James asked when Remus set the glass back onto the nightstand.

Remus was about to say no, but then stopped to think. He had always longed for physical contact, soft things that meant that one was cared for. For the first time in his adult life, someone was offering him exactly that. And not just anyone—his mate.

He was mated.

And his mate was offering him cuddles.

Remus nodded.

“Come here, then,” James said, lifting his arm and gesturing for Remus.

Remus hesitated, then lay down and shuffled closer to James. He wasn’t sure how James wanted him. Was there a typical position for cuddling that he didn’t know about?

Before his thoughts could get out of control, James had pulled him against his solid body, and Remus ended up lying half on top of him, head resting on his shoulder as James curled closer.

“My mate,” James muttered and sniffed Remus’s hair.

Remus wondered what he smelled like to James. He had said that Remus’s pheromones drove him a little crazy, but what did that mean, exactly?

Remus’s nose was very close to James’s neck gland, and he allowed himself to sniff gently, getting a whiff of James’s scent. It was very nice, but Remus wasn’t sure how else to describe it, how to describe how it made him feel.

They cuddled for a long time, then had dinner together before Remus had to go home. Once he arrived at his dreary flat, his mood plummeted. He hadn’t realised how light he had felt with James.

He undressed and showered, got dressed in his pyjamas, and headed to bed. He lay down on his cold sheets and lumpy mattress, and worried.

What if he had made a mistake mating with James? James didn’t know him at all, and once he learned more about him, he would regret binding himself to someone so... miserable. Because Remus was miserable, both mentally and physically. James hadn’t undressed him enough to see his scars, and Remus knew they were going to be an issue once James saw them. He would probably not want to touch Remus again. He hadn’t seen where Remus lived, had no idea that Remus lived in such poverty—his flat cold and his things old, he himself equally worn out. He hadn’t seen Remus around the full moon.

There was little good in Remus’s life, and each new day was a reminder of all the struggles the wizarding society put him through because of what he was. Holding a Muggle job wasn’t exactly easy, either, because he had to take time off around the full moon. He had explained it as a health issue, but he was certain that his employer would eventually tire of it.

James obviously came from money. Remus couldn’t contribute to their relationship in any way. He should have told James, told him how Remus was never going to get anything more than what he already had, told him that he hadn’t had a single romantic relationship in his entire life and would be terrible at it.

He would also be terrible at sex. Would James realise he had never been with anyone? Being a virgin at the age of twenty-nine was embarrassing, and James would think that there was something wrong with him, which was, of course, true; he was a werewolf, that was what was wrong with him. He hadn’t been allowed to go to Hogwarts, and even though he had attended Muggle school, his parents had forbidden him from getting close to anyone, so he’d had no real contacts with anyone his age. He had missed all the typical teenage experiences of learning relationships: having dramatic breakups, and kissing someone chastely and then less chastely, and groping each other awkwardly in their bedroom while their parents weren’t home.

Remus had hardly had any friends. He had met a couple of other werewolves at the Werewolf Registry, as they had been waiting for some kind of issue to be solved. They had all agreed that the issue had probably been made up and was simply another way for the Ministry to torment werewolves because the werewolves kept tormenting them with their continued existence. They didn’t see each other often, and Remus didn’t know them particularly well,

but it was reassuring to know that he had someone to write to and talk about their experiences as werewolves in a society that persistently rejected them.

How many friends did James have? He seemed like an outgoing person, so he most likely had plenty of friends and acquaintances. He would be popular at work, too.

Where did he work, anyway?

Remus was sure that James had told him, but he couldn't remember. It seemed like a detail he should remember.

Had James not told him yet?

Remus would have to ask. And apologise for forgetting something so important.

Oh, and James would want to introduce Remus to his friends, wouldn't he? Would he also tell them that Remus was a werewolf? Would they convince James to break the bond and find someone normal, someone less dangerous? If they were good friends, they would.

Remus had acted too hastily. He hadn't stopped to think long enough, and now he had got both himself and James in trouble. No one wanted their friend to bond with a monster—and an alpha monster at that.

Maybe Remus really should run, hide in a cave somewhere far away from people where he couldn't hurt anyone. The Ministry wouldn't bother looking for him. They would be happy to be rid of yet another beast.

He would have to tell James first. Maybe he would write a letter. Apologise profusely. He didn't know how long it took for a mating mark to heal, but if James started looking for a new mate immediately, it should all work out for the best.

Remus couldn't stop his thoughts from spinning out of control, and he hardly slept a wink that night.

Chapter End Notes

I have finished chapter 11! Sadly, I have not started chapter 12 yet because I've been unwell, but I've been thinking about it.

Anyway, can't wait to post chapter 6 next week, it's going to be a fun one. :-)

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Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus looked tired when he stepped out of the fireplace.

“Hello,” James said.

“Hello.”

James took Remus’s jacket, and after taking it to the hall, returned to Remus, who was standing still, looking at James uncertainly. James wanted to press his face into Remus’s neck and immediately scent him, but he waited instead, keeping a pleasant smile on his face in the hopes that it would encourage Remus, whose scent was starting to swirl around them. A wave of courage surged in it, and Remus leaned forward, then hurriedly backed away, the freshness of his scent replaced by the bitter tang of... humiliation?

Remus turned to look at the sofa. After a moment’s hesitation, James guided him to the dining table, and they sat down to eat.

Had Remus wanted to kiss him?

Had Remus wanted to kiss James but then been overcome by nerves?

James watched Remus—hopefully surreptitiously—and wondered if Remus was genuinely shy or if he had been burned before. Had he maybe been in a relationship when he had been bitten, and his lover had then abandoned him? Had he, perhaps, been turned down when he had tried to kiss someone whom he had thought liked him? It might have happened quite a while ago, leaving Remus uncertain about new relationships, and maybe that was why he was so hesitant and clumsy.

Remus seemed deep in thought, so James didn’t try to start a conversation. Remus’s scent was no longer as bitter, which was good; James wanted Remus to feel relaxed around him. If only he knew what he could do to help.

After they had finished their meal and James had sent the dishes into the sink, Remus’s scent had calmed down to what it had been right after their mating, before Remus had been overcome with emotions. James wondered how long it would take before Remus was so comfortable around him that his scent lost the constant undercurrent of nervousness.

“Should we head to bed, then?” James asked.

Remus turned his eyes to him and thought for a moment before nodding. James guided him to the bed, and they sat down side by side. The nervousness in Remus’s scent had grown stronger, but it wasn’t as strong as it had been before they had mated. James hoped it meant Remus was already growing comfortable around him.

“Kiss?” James asked.

Remus didn’t hesitate before nodding. James waited for a beat, but when Remus didn’t make a move to come closer, James leaned towards him instead.

Remus was a timid kisser. Considering how shy he was in general, it shouldn’t have been surprising, but James was still a bit surprised. He had hoped that their previous kisses as well as the mating would have given Remus more courage, but that didn’t seem to be the case. Maybe Remus hadn’t kissed in a long time and was out of practice.

But it didn’t matter because James liked kissing Remus, even if Remus couldn’t quite seem to figure out where to put his hands, even if his lips were a bit stiff. James placed his hand on the back of Remus’s head, his other hand settling on his waist. Remus had been very nervous the previous day, and James couldn’t tell if it had been because of the sex or the mating, so he had decided it was safer to keep his hands to himself and discuss sex once Remus had lost a bit more of the nervousness or brought it up himself.

One of Remus’s hands was resting on James’s shoulder and the other one hovered over his waist. Remus’s hands were delightfully big, and James wanted to know what they would feel like roaming over his skin.

James kissed his way to Remus’s jaw, and Remus’s scent flared with excitement even before James’s lips touched his neck. Remus leaned his head aside to give James room to make his way down to his scent gland and the mating mark. The mark had started healing nicely, and James kissed around it before pressing his lips against the scent gland. Remus gasped and turned his head more, completely exposing his neck.

James aligned their necks to press their glands together. Remus’s hold of his shoulder tightened as their scents swirled around them, and Remus’s uncertain hand found its place against James’s back, pulling him closer. James went happily. Remus was warm and his scent had cleared of all nervousness, the scenting pushing away the superficial and bringing out the base.

Remus’s base scent was magnificent; it was untamed and earthy, a little bit wild and undoubtedly strong, carrying in it confidence that James had only ever been able to glimpse in Remus twice.

And some of the confidence had now seeped into Remus’s behaviour, as he held James with firm hands.

As much as James would have liked to lose himself in the scenting, he was very aware of the state of his cock that had been steadily fattening as they continued. He reminded himself of the decision he had made—that he would keep things as non-sexual as he could until Remus was more comfortable with him—so he slowly pulled away from Remus, pressing one last kiss onto his gland.

There was a small smile on Remus’s face as he straightened his head and opened his eyes. James could feel his own smile widening. His thoughts were pleasantly muddled from the scenting, and he pressed a small kiss onto the tip of Remus’s nose.

“Cuddles?” he asked.

Remus hesitated for a moment, then nodded. James settled on the bed and pulled Remus closer. Remus carefully rested his head on James’s shoulder and James wrapped his arms around him.

They lay quietly, listening to each other breathe. James’s swirling thoughts were starting to organise themselves again, and he remembered they had to discuss their arrangements for the next week, as Harry was going to be home with him.

“How should we do this next week?” James asked.

Remus turned to look at him with a frown.

“I just have a feeling you’re not quite ready to meet Harry yet,” James said, “so maybe you’d like me to come to your place instead. I can ask Sirius to take him for a couple of hours on Monday and Tuesday, so you can come here, but Sirius’s mate is returning from a long business trip on Wednesday and will want to spend some quality time with him, so we’ll have to figure out what to do then.”

Remus’s frown deepened.

“What— Who *is* Harry?” he asked. “You’ve mentioned him but never said.”

An odd, cold feeling spread over James. His eyes narrowed as he tried to remember the conversation he must have had with Remus about Harry. It should be easy to remember—he was certain that Remus had been apprehensive about it.

“Harry,” James said, then cleared his throat. “Harry’s my son.”

James watched the blood drain from Remus’s face and swallowed. Remus sat up.

“He,” James started, then floundered for a moment. “I told you about him. Didn’t I?”

Remus stared at him, not reacting outwardly, but fear was creeping into his scent.

“I did, didn’t I?” James asked, his voice getting distraught.

Remus turned to look away. James tried to feverishly remember every one of their conversations because there was no way he hadn’t told Remus who Harry was. There was no way he had bonded with Remus without telling him that he was effectively becoming a stepfather to his son. He wouldn’t be that stupid.

Would he?

“And,” Remus asked, “who is Sirius?”

“He’s my best friend. And Harry’s godfather. We also work together. Isn’t that cool?”

“So, you’re both…” Remus began, then stopped to think.

“Yeah, we both always wanted to be Aurors,” James said, feeling relieved that he could avert Remus’s attention to something else before they had to discuss the Harry situation.

Remus went stiff, and suddenly, the air was filled with the stench of fear. James had never smelled such a powerful scent on anyone, and it made his insides fill with ice. His instincts were screaming for him to help his mate who was in distress, and he battled hard to stay put.

He was the source of Remus’s fear.

Why?

Slowly, Remus turned to look at him. His face was pale, his lips pressed together, and his wide eyes met James’s. The fear seemed to be so strong that Remus was momentarily incapable of protecting the most vulnerable part of himself, baring it all for James to see on his face, in his eyes, in his body language, and for a blink of an eye, James profoundly understood him.

Remus was a sore that had been poked one too many times, that had to hide behind a barrier which kept him from being hurt again. He was terrified of opening himself up to being poked, because the next poke might be too much. The next poke might be what would utterly destroy him, as he was already crumbling, his life chipping him away bit by bit until there would be nothing left unless someone helped him carry the burden.

And he was terrified of James being the thing that shattered him.

Then Remus’s eyes shuttered, and the moment was over, but the scent remained. It wasn’t getting any milder, and James didn’t know what to do. He was lying there frozen, watching Remus stare at him before he shuffled to the edge of the bed and stood up. His hands were shaking.

“Remus?”

“You’re... you’re an Auror.”

James paused before saying, “Yes?”

He hadn’t thought it would be possible for Remus’s fear to become even more intense.

“Remus?”

Remus took a step back.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked.

“What? I did tell you. Didn’t I?”

James was absolutely certain he had told Remus what he did for a living. They had been discussing their jobs, or he wouldn’t know that Remus was a librarian. He had told Remus during that conversation.

Except Remus's reaction was proving him wrong.

"There's no way it wouldn't have come up," James said, but his voice lacked conviction. "I... Isn't that one of the first things you tell someone when you meet them?"

"You didn't tell me you have a child, either."

James had nothing to say to that. He tried to think back to all the conversations they'd had, but Remus's distressed scent was jumbling his thoughts.

"I'm sorry," James said. "I wouldn't have purposefully..."

Remus turned to look away.

"Is that," James asked slowly. "Is me being an Auror a deal-breaker?"

Remus hesitated for only a moment before nodding.

"Right," James said. "Okay."

He had to think. What should he do? Remus was scared of him, so there was probably nothing that he could do, but Remus also hadn't run away yet, so maybe James could somehow salvage the situation and at least calm Remus down a little bit. But he didn't know how. He hadn't moved an inch after Remus's fear had arisen. He was sure that the scent he was sending out was soothing, but Remus might not even notice it through the thickness of his own scent.

"Do you want to break our bond?" James asked.

Remus bit his lip and looked down, although James had a feeling he was still keeping an eye on him. He could only wait and remain as non-threatening as possible.

"I don't know," Remus finally said.

"Okay."

James didn't know what he was supposed to say. He needed to offer a solution, but he didn't know what that would be. If Remus didn't know whether to break their bond, he needed time to think, but their bond was still fresh and needed to be renewed every day so that it gained strength, which didn't leave Remus with any time to think.

"Do you," James said, trying to keep his voice soft. "We could keep the bond for now, and you take your time to think. That means that we will still have to see each other every day to scent. Do you think that's okay with you?"

Remus was intently staring at the floor, his hands fisted at his sides. They were no longer shaking. He thought for a long time before he nodded, and James took a deep breath, then slowly, very slowly, sat up. Remus was watching him from the corner of his eye, but at least his scent wasn't getting any worse.

“Okay,” James said. “You can take as much time as you need to figure out what you want. But like I said, Harry will be here next week. I can send him to Sirius’s while you’re here, but on Wednesday, Sirius’s mate is coming back home, and I can’t ask them to change their plans for his return. He’s been away for three weeks.”

“What about his mother?”

“I... We don’t talk. I... I would prefer not to contact her about this because it’s going to turn into an argument. However,” James hurried to say when Remus opened his mouth, “I will do that if I can’t think of anything else. I understand that you’d be uncomfortable showing me where you live and letting me into your home, and I want to do what makes you the most comfortable. So, I will arrange for Harry not to be here while you’re here.”

Remus nodded.

“Do you,” James asked. “Do you want to leave now?”

Remus nodded.

“Do you want me to walk you out?”

Remus shook his head.

“Okay.” James sighed quietly. “I’ll see you tomorrow, then. And we’ll talk when you’re ready.”

Remus stood still for a moment longer, then hurried out of the room. James listened to him walk through the flat, and soon, the front door closed.

The stench of Remus’s fear lingered in the air. It was making James sick, so he got up, strode to the Floo, and soon stepped out of the fireplace in Sirius’s sitting room.

“Sirius!”

“Just a sec!”

James went over to the sofa and sat down, then immediately sprung up again and paced the room. He stopped at the fireplace to look at the photos on the mantle, then paced again, pushing his hands in his hair and pulling, pacing, a floorboard creaked under his footsteps and he pulled on his hair again, and then he heard Sirius in the doorway.

“Merlin, you stink,” Sirius said as he stepped in.

James spun around to face him, hands still in his hair. Sirius’s brows went up.

“Whoa, James,” he said and took a cautious step closer, as if James were a wild animal and might flee. “What happened?”

“I fucked up. I fucked up so bad.”

“All right,” Sirius said in a low voice. “Let’s sit down. Come on, now.”

Sirius’s scent was soothing and his hand was warm against James’s back as he guided him to the sofa. James dropped onto it.

“Fuck,” he said and pulled on his hair.

“Let’s stop doing that,” Sirius said and gently extracted James’s hands from his hair before sitting down next to him.

“I fucked up.”

“What did you exactly fuck up?”

James turned to stare at Sirius. Sirius was watching him with a neutral expression.

“Remus,” James said. “I— Apparently I never told him I’m an Auror.”

Sirius waited for a beat before saying, “So? Is your job important?”

“Sirius, the fucking fear! I’ve never... I didn’t think... The fear!”

“What fear are you talking about exactly?”

James swallowed and sank his hands into his hair again. Sirius pulled them out and kept a hold of his wrists.

“He’s afraid of me,” James forced out his constricting throat. “He’s so fucking afraid of me.”

Sirius looked as if he was trying to solve a puzzle. James couldn’t fathom why it was so hard for him to understand.

“It’s a deal-breaker for him,” James said. “I wouldn’t have even needed to ask, it was pretty obvious from the fear, but he said so and he’s so... My mate is afraid of me.”

The horrible lump of feelings that had gathered inside James when he had first realised Remus was afraid of him turned into tears. James sobbed and pulled his hands free from Sirius’s grip to press them into his hair. He could smell Sirius’s alarm, but then his nose got too stuffy for him to smell anything. Sirius awkwardly patted him on the back.

James didn’t know how long it took him to calm down. Sirius went to fetch him a glass of water once it became obvious that James was done crying. James drank the water, then cleaned up his lenses and wiped his face before turning to look at Sirius again.

“Now,” Sirius said, “you’re going to tell me exactly what happened.”

James nodded, but had to take a moment to breathe. Sirius was calmly waiting, and James found it somewhat eerie; he couldn’t remember the last time Sirius had been so calm while he had been distressed.

“We met for the scenting,” James said, his voice still stuffy. “And it was all good, and then I asked him how he wants to do it next week because I’ll have Harry. Well, turns out I never told him I have a kid.”

Sirius raised his brows but didn’t comment.

“And I mentioned your name,” James continued, “and he asked who you are and I said we’re friends and that we’re Aurors. And almost immediately after I said that... the stench! I’ve never smelled anything like it before.”

“I guess that explains why you stink. I think it stuck to you.”

“Do you have any idea what it feels like to realise your mate is distressed because he’s afraid of you?”

“Can’t say I do.”

James let out a wavering breath. Sirius was watching him, probably worried he was going to break down again. He might.

“What happened then?” Sirius asked. “If it’s a deal-breaker, I’m assuming he wants to break the bond.”

“He doesn’t know. I asked him and he said he doesn’t know. So I told him he can take as long as he wants to think about it, but... We’re obviously going to have to maintain our bond while he thinks, in case he decides it’s safe for him to stay bonded to me, so... so he’s going to come back tomorrow, and what if he’s still... What if I do something that frightens him? I’ll have to be so careful.”

Sirius said nothing, but he looked thoughtful.

“I’m assuming he’s had bad experiences with Aurors,” James said, “and the more I think about it, the less it surprises me. In training, Moody told me to dig deep every time I encounter a werewolf, to hopefully find a reason to arrest them.”

“Oh really? Butterfield told me to make up charges if I could get away with it, to have as many werewolves arrested as possible. I always thought that was a bit daft anyway, because how are you supposed to know if someone is a werewolf or not?”

“Werewolves are legally obliged to tell law enforcement that they are werewolves.”

“Are they? Well, that explains why I’ve sometimes had werewolves volunteering that information when I’ve talked to them.”

James shook his head. He wondered if Remus was even going to show up again.

“So,” Sirius asked after a while, “what *are* you going to do next week? About Harry?”

“I don’t know. The obvious solution is for me to go to Remus’s, but I don’t think he’s going to want to show me where he lives.”

“Do you know the general area?”

James shook his head.

“I wonder why he hasn’t told you,” Sirius mumbled.

James glared at him.

“I’m just saying,” Sirius said and shrugged. “How do you know he’s not after your money?”

“Merlin’s balls! I’ve hardly shown him my bank statements, have I?”

“He probably knows that the Potters are well off.”

“Can we not do this right now?”

Sirius looked sheepish and nodded. James sighed.

“I don’t blame Remus for being scared of Aurors,” he said, “when even my best friend isn’t ready to support my decision to mate with him. Imagine how the Aurors who know nothing about him would act.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll try harder to be nice about him. But you’ll have to admit it’s quite a lot to come to terms with.”

“Why, though? He’s literally just a person.”

Sirius looked at him for a moment before he summoned a bottle of brandy and two glasses.

“Why don’t you tell me about him?” Sirius suggested. “Maybe that will help.”

James took in a breath.

“He’s very shy,” he said. “Like, he does tell me stuff when I ask, but he doesn’t really… volunteer information or start conversations.”

Sirius opened the bottle and poured them both a generous amount.

“He’s a librarian,” James said.

Sirius turned to stare at James with his mouth agape. James bit his lip and said nothing.

“Jim. He’s a librarian. Does he also look like a librarian?”

“Well…”

Sirius threw his head back and groaned. James took his glass and sipped at the brandy.

“How on earth,” Sirius started, then took a moment to find his words. “How did you end up with a librarian? What’s wrong with you?”

James shrugged.

“Tell me,” Sirius said, leaning closer, “what exactly was it about him that drew you in? He’s a librarian!”

James smiled as he thought of Remus confidently standing up for himself, not holding back his nature, and how his pheromones had swirled around him.

“I was a goner the moment he went all alpha on me,” he said dreamily.

“What?”

“For a brief moment, he forgot to hold back his nature, and it was... glorious. He was... amazing. Gorgeous.”

Sirius took a sip of his drink but kept his eyes on James.

“And I like the soft side of him too,” James said. “He’s so cute and so sweet, but I’m hoping that he will eventually grow comfortable enough with me to let that side of him show again. I saw a bit of it while we mated and while we scented today.”

“Hmm. What do you mean ‘he forgot to hold back’?”

“Oh, he’s... his behaviour is a bit odd.”

Sirius narrowed his eyes. James shook his head and took a sip of his brandy before continuing.

“It’s nothing bad. It’s just that... well, you know how it is right after you’ve mated with someone, all the possessiveness and the yearning to be close to your mate and the need to scent them when you are together.”

Sirius nodded.

“I might be mistaken since we only just mated yesterday, but it seems to me that Remus is trying his hardest to battle those instincts, and I don’t understand why he would do that.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” James said and watched Sirius finally take a sip of his own brandy. “I mean that when he came over today, he perked up and started to lean closer, but then he suddenly went all stiff and backed away. But does that mean he doesn’t want to, or is it just that he’s nervous?”

Sirius raised his glass to his lips and took a sip.

“Of course, none of that matters now,” James said and stared into his drink. “He’s afraid of me.”

James took a drink before turning to look at Sirius, who seemed thoughtful.

“Well,” Sirius said, “his behaviour doesn’t sound normal. But you said he’s shy, so maybe he’s just... shy?”

“I know he’s never been bonded before. Maybe he just... maybe he didn’t expect it to be like that.”

Sirius nodded and took a drink.

“He was really nervous about mating,” James said, swirling the brandy in his glass. “I wonder... I wonder if he thinks he shouldn’t give in to his instincts because he’s a werewolf. Maybe he... well, I don’t know how long he has been a werewolf, but maybe it’s been long enough that he doesn’t know what normal instincts are like.”

“How long would that be? Since before puberty?”

James shrugged. “I don’t know.”

He raised his glass to his lips and took a sip. The alcohol burned down his throat and settled into a pleasant warmth in his gut.

Sirius cleared his throat. “Have you considered... since he seems to be very shy and slow to warm up to people, maybe he hasn’t had very many relationships? Maybe he’s not used to all the instincts that come with a relationship and that’s why they scare him.”

James thought about that and took a drink. He supposed it would make sense for a werewolf to have a hard time finding a partner. Perhaps Remus hadn’t properly dated since he’d been a teenager, when all his instincts were still developing. He might not be used to the instincts an adult alpha had when it came to dating and bonding and sex.

“Maybe,” James said.

It would explain why Remus was nervous about physical contact. And how clumsy he had been when they had first kissed.

“Or maybe it’s what you said,” James said. “Maybe he’s just shy.”

They both went quiet. James drained his glass and tried not to think about the scent of Remus’s fear. He couldn’t get it out of his nose, and Sirius was probably right to say that it had stuck to him.

“Oh,” Sirius said, “what about Harry? If Remus doesn’t want you to visit him but doesn’t want to meet Harry, what are you going to do?”

“Well, I’m assuming you’ll be okay taking him on Monday and Tuesday. He might not even need to stay long, I don’t think Remus will want to spend much time with me outside of the actual scenting.”

“Yes, that’s fine. But what about Wednesday? I could take him on Wednesday too.”

James shook his head. Sirius reached for the bottle and poured James another drink. James took a gulp of it.

“I’m not going to let you change your plans,” he said. “I’m just... if nothing else, I’m going to have to talk to Lily.”

Sirius, who had been raising his glass to his lips, froze. James took a drink.

“You’re going to talk to Lily,” Sirius repeated. “Wow, you’re going all out for this guy.”

“Of course. I... I would have done it even if he wasn’t currently afraid of me. I would have. He’s... he’s special. I can feel it.”

James finished his drink. Sirius lowered his hand.

“Am—am I a bad person for being kind of glad that we had bonded before he found out I’m an Auror?” James asked quietly, his gaze glued to the bottom of his empty glass. “If he had found out beforehand, he wouldn’t have given me a chance at all. I’m a bad person for thinking that, aren’t I?”

“Maybe a little.”

James nodded. He wanted another drink, but forced himself to place the glass on the coffee table. He had work the next day.

“What a mess,” he said and slumped against the backrest.

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy, this chapter. I had taken a months long break before I started writing this chapter, and once I had pretty much finished, I realised a lot of the stuff I wrote contradicted what the previous chapters had already established, so I scrapped it and started again. I had finished chapter 7 before I decided that it didn't actually work, so I cut 10k words and rewrote this chapter again. But now it works.

In other news, I've been slowly working on chapter 12, but I'm having issues with my arm and can't write as much as I would like. I did also start chapter 13 because I came up with another plot... well, I wouldn't call it a plot twist, exactly, so let's call it a plot development, and couldn't wait to write it down.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed the plot development in this chapter!

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Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus had called in sick, even though he never did that outside of full moons. He didn't think he would have been any good for anyone at work, anyway; he'd had another sleepless night, trying to arrange his thoughts into something resembling order.

Fact one was that James was an Auror. Fact two was that he had a child.

Remus wanted to stay as far away from Aurors as he could, yet he had unwittingly mated with one. And not only that, his mate's best friend was an Auror as well. Not to mention, he was bound to have plenty of colleagues he was friendly with...

Remus thought about every encounter he'd had with Aurors, how they gleefully prodded at his patience during interrogations, hoping that he would lash out, so they'd have a reason to arrest him. How his friends had been arrested because one of them talked back. How they sneered at every werewolf they encountered while visiting the Werewolf Registry.

Why would an Auror bind themselves to a werewolf?

Had James been purposefully hiding things? There was no other reason as to why he wouldn't have told Remus that he was an Auror and had a child. Remus just couldn't understand why.

Remus could never let his friends meet his mate. Not that he had been thinking of introducing them anyway, but now it was certain he could never do that. James may have been nice to Remus, but who knew—maybe he wouldn't be as nice to werewolves whose pheromones didn't drive him *a little crazy*.

And James's best friend was an Auror too. Were all of James's friends Aurors?

What had Remus got himself into?

James must have told his best friend about the bonding—that was something people usually talked about with their best friend, wasn't it? Had he also told him that Remus was a werewolf? How had that conversation gone? Had Sirius tried to change his mind about the bonding?

James had known that Remus was a werewolf since the day the Alpha Mating Registry had told him, but he hadn't done anything about it. Nothing bad had happened to Remus—but then, it had only been a couple of days.

But why would an Auror mate with a werewolf in the first place? It made no sense.

And then there was the issue of the child. Harry, was it? Remus knew nothing about children. The goal was to move in together at some point, wasn't it? So logically, it followed that

Remus would become his stepfather.

How old was Harry anyway?

There was no way Harry's mother was okay with her son being exposed to a werewolf. James must have left that detail out when he had told her about him.

Had James even told her? He had said that they didn't talk any longer, so maybe he hadn't told her about Remus at all. And he wouldn't want anyone to know that he had bonded with a werewolf. He would ask Remus to keep it a secret from all his friends, wouldn't he?

Remus's stomach churned as he made his way to James's. He almost didn't want to go. He wasn't sure why he was even entertaining the thought of staying in a relationship with an Auror. What was wrong with him?

The previous day, Remus had been too taken aback by the revelation and hadn't been able to control his emotions. James probably thought he was weak and breakable—was it even safe for him to go back?

Remus didn't feel comfortable taking the Floo that would place him directly in James's sitting room, so he Apparated to his door instead. James opened the door and smiled, but it was mild compared to usual. Remus glanced at his eyes, then looked away and stepped inside.

What was he supposed to say?

His eyes found the mating mark on James's neck, and he instinctually started leaning forward to press his nose against it and inhale his mate's scent, but forced himself to back off. He hadn't been doing a very good job at keeping his alpha side in check around James, and it frightened him—even more so now that he knew who James really was. One day, he was bound to completely lose control, and then James would know what a terrible decision he had made, bonding with a werewolf. He would be afraid of Remus, like everyone else who had witnessed his alpha side coming out, and then he would arrest Remus. It would be easy for him to claim assault.

Why had he not told Remus? Did he think that it would have changed Remus's mind about bonding with him? But how was that an issue? James could easily find another mate, someone who was good with children and wasn't a werewolf.

James cleared his throat. "Do you—do you want to come in?"

Remus shook his head.

"Oh," James said, as if he hadn't expected that response.

They stood awkwardly by the door. Remus couldn't look James in the eye, but he also couldn't look at the mating mark on his neck, so his eyes were roaming around the hall instead, taking in details he hadn't had the chance to see the previous times he had been there; among James's clothes, there were child-sized clothes, small shoes discarded on the

floor, and Remus felt stupid even though it wasn't his fault that he had never been in James's hallway before. Had James done that on purpose?

And why had there been no signs of a child anywhere else in the house? Remus hadn't looked at the photos on James's mantle because that seemed like an invasion of privacy, but wouldn't a child's home have other signs as well? Why were there no childish drawings on the walls? Where were all the discarded toys?

Had James really been purposefully hiding the fact that he was a father?

"Right," James said, and the usual confidence was missing from his voice. "Do you still want to keep our bond?"

Remus nodded.

"Okay," James said, and Remus thought he sounded relieved. "Good. Should— How do we — Would you scent me?"

Remus didn't react immediately.

"Please," James said.

He slightly raised his arm in invitation, but didn't reach out to touch. Remus watched him for a moment, then took off his scarf to expose his neck. James's face lit up when Remus did that, and Remus was only getting more confused.

"Please," James said.

Remus took a hesitant step forward, all the while watching James for a sign of... what? Something sinister. Something evil. A sign that he had been planning something and his plan was coming to fruition.

Remus took another step forward, which brought him to touching distance to James. James was still standing motionless, his body open in invitation. Remus glanced at the mating mark on his neck, his gland spreading his scent around them, pulling Remus in.

James leaned down, and Remus leaned in to bring their necks together. The first touch was a little surge of energy, something electric that travelled through Remus's body and straight to his cock. Their scents were quickly filling the room, and Remus pressed their bodies together. James's scent was heavy but not unpleasantly so, and Remus wanted to bathe in it, wanted it to stick to his skin. He lifted his hand to the back of James's head to pull him in, to keep him still as Remus rubbed their necks together.

Remus wrapped his free arm around James's body. James was his mate, and holding his mate was important. He needed to do it with utmost care, make sure that his mate was safe in his arms, safe from the outside world and any threats it possessed.

James's hand settled on Remus's hip, and Remus wanted him to move it to his cock instead. He wanted so much, but James hadn't expressed any interest in a repeat, and Remus didn't understand why. Did James not want him?

Had he thought that Remus was bad at it? Remus hadn't done much, had he; James had done all the touching and the undressing and the kissing. He probably thought Remus would always expect him to do all the work and wouldn't care to find out how to make him feel good in return.

Or maybe he had realised that Remus would be horribly scarred. That was it, wasn't it? James had realised that werewolves were bound to have scars and found the idea revolting. He wouldn't want to see Remus's body or touch it.

Remus stopped rubbing their glands together. The pleasurable surge of belonging was quickly waning, and the horrible reality returned to the forefront of his mind. Remus loosened his hold of James, pulling both his hands back before moving his neck away as well.

James's eyes were closed as Remus looked at him. He had a wide, slightly dazed smile on his face. Slowly, he opened his eyes and his smile widened as his gaze met Remus's. Remus felt a smile tugging at the corners of his own lips, but he battled it away. James started to lean in, then seemed to remember himself and stepped back instead. Remus's heart did something odd in his chest, and he didn't know what to think about it.

Remus watched James for a while longer, then draped his scarf over his neck again. The last remains of James's smile disappeared.

"Right, okay," James said. "I'll see you tomorrow, then?"

Remus nodded. He stood still for a moment longer, then turned around and walked out. The bitter wind immediately attacked him, and he wasted no time Apparating to the Apparition point back home.

As he walked home, he prodded at the odd feeling that resided in him. It was something like anxiety, but Remus couldn't even begin to guess what would have caused it. It hadn't been there when he had been on his way to James's. It had something to do with their scenting, probably, but Remus didn't know at what point it had developed, exactly.

Once home, Remus took his scarf off and got a whiff of the scent that had seeped into it. It smelled of James.

Saturday's scenting was the same as Friday's, except Remus returned home feeling even worse than he had the previous day. He could not figure out what caused it. Maybe it was nerves over James being an Auror. Maybe it was a side-effect of the scenting that Remus hadn't known to expect. Maybe it was completely unrelated to the scenting.

On Sunday, James looked miserable. Remus felt miserable, but he hoped that he was hiding it better than James.

After the scenting, James cleared his throat.

"I have arranged for Harry to visit friends on Wednesday and Thursday," he said. "On Thursday, it will be a week since we bonded, so we don't need to see each other every single

day. I would suggest meeting every other day. Harry can go to Sirius's while you're here on Saturday. I just... thought I'd update you on that."

Remus nodded, then left.

At home, he lay in bed, lazily stroking his scent gland to smell their bond scent. He missed his mate, he missed feeling close to him, and that made no sense because they had only cuddled once after the mating. They hadn't even kissed very many times. How could he miss something he hadn't had the chance to get used to yet?

Remus hadn't decided what he wanted to do. He needed to decide before their three weeks were up and they had to go to the Registry—to either register their relationship or to announce that they had decided not to go through with it after all.

If they broke their bond, Remus's options for a new mate might be limited, but there were bound to be other people who wouldn't mind mating with a werewolf. If James, an Auror, had been fine with it, surely someone else would be too. And that someone else wouldn't be an Auror or work at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures.

Remus had never imagined he could run into an Auror and not know. James hadn't been wearing Auror robes when he had visited the Registry. Or the next day when he had been on his way to work. Why was that?

Remus pulled the pillow out from under his head and rubbed it against his scent gland. He froze once he realised what he was doing, and lay there motionless, the pillow still pressed against his neck.

He shouldn't allow any instinctual behaviour, not even while he was by himself.

But scenting the pillow seemed to lessen the heavy feeling in his gut. After a moment's hesitation, he continued, rubbing his scent all over the pillow before pulling it away and burying his face in it. It smelled of their bond, and he closed his eyes, breathing it in. He had already grown familiar with it over the past few days of being bonded to James, and it made his heart soar and his cock stir with interest. It made him feel nervous, but it also made him feel safe.

Remus thought about kissing James for the first time, how patient he had been. And he hadn't said anything about Remus's lack of finesse.

Remus thought about having sex with James. His first time having sex. It had been the best first time he could have hoped for; James had been gentle with him, had made sure that he was okay with it, and hadn't made fun of Remus's nerves. He hadn't laughed when Remus had cried afterwards; instead, he had offered comfort. Support.

And all the while, he had known that Remus was a werewolf.

He had known, yet he had still been so... kind.

James was kind.

And how could someone so kind be an Auror?

On Tuesday, the moment James opened the door, Remus blurted out, “I want to talk.”

James quickly reigned in the surprise that had taken over his face and stepped aside to let Remus in. His scent was hovering around them almost uncertainly, and Remus found it curious he gave the scent a feeling. When he had been a kid, he could tell what people’s scents were saying about their feelings—especially his parents’—but he had since lost that ability. He couldn’t help wondering if it was caused by the lycanthropy.

“Do you want to go sit down?” James asked.

Remus nodded. He followed James to the sofa, where they sat down on opposite ends. Remus felt cold.

James seemed apprehensive as he watched Remus. On the coffee table there was a pack of Exploding Snap cards, next to which a toy wand had been abandoned, but didn’t children usually have more toys around the house? Every room in Remus’s childhood home had been cluttered with toys. Was Harry an unusually tidy child?

Remus turned to look at the dining table at the other end of the room. Scraps of paper and a collection of crayons lay on it, and behind them was a small stack of books that looked like schoolbooks.

When Remus had previously visited, there had been no signs of a child in the sitting room. He knew that for certain because he had been nervously looking everywhere but at James. Had James purposefully cleaned away all the evidence of having a child? Or was it simply a side effect of him having cleaned up before a visitor?

“How old is he?” Remus asked.

“Huh?” James turned to look at the dining table before turning back to Remus. “He’s eight. Turning nine in July.”

“And does he know about me?”

“Yes, he knows I have a new mate.”

Remus paused for a moment. “No. Does he *know* about me?”

James sighed and pushed his fingers through his hair, leaving it even messier than it had been before. Remus waited in trepidation.

“No,” James said. “No, he doesn’t know. And he doesn’t need to know until you’re ready to tell him.”

“And what about his mother? Does she know you’re bonded to a monster?”

“You’re not a monster.”

Remus said nothing.

“You’re not a monster,” James said. “You’re a sweet, sensitive man, and I’m sure Harry will love you when you eventually meet each other.”

“Even though I’m dangerous?”

“You’re not dangerous.”

Remus scoffed at that.

“You’re only dangerous during the full moon,” James said. “Outside of that, you are a kind man. And I’m proud that you are my mate.”

Remus searched James’s voice for traces of a lie, but found nothing. He was watching James’s face very carefully, even paying attention to his scent, but he couldn’t find deceit. Although, James *was* an Auror—he was probably a good actor.

“I don’t know anything about children,” Remus said quietly.

“That’s okay. You will learn. And it’s... I’m not expecting you to suddenly jump in and start raising him as a full-time parent. You... you can take your time getting used to the idea of him, and then you’ll meet him when you’re ready.”

Remus didn’t think he would ever be ready to parent anyone. He hardly felt qualified to be a grown-up in the first place—how was he supposed to offer guidance and support to someone else?

“Have you told your friends about me?” Remus found himself asking.

James looked surprised, but said, “I’ve told Sirius. He knows.”

“Does he *know*?”

“He does, yes. I told him before we bonded.”

Then why hadn’t he tried to stop James from bonding with a werewolf? Was it a scheme? But why?

Two Aurors had known about him for days. Remus had been spending a lot of time alone with one of them. Yet nothing bad had happened.

Did it mean that Remus could trust them? His head kept telling him he couldn’t, but why not?

“And how did he take it?” he asked.

“Oh, he was much more concerned about you being a librarian.”

Remus frowned. It sounded like a lie, but nothing about James seemed insincere.

“I don’t want to talk anymore,” Remus said.

“Okay. In that case, would you scent me, please?”

Remus did, and after it was over, he lingered, his face very close to James’s. James was wearing his usual dopy smile, and Remus wanted nothing more than to kiss him.

But rather than do that, he pulled away. James’s smile disappeared.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Remus said and left.

He had hoped that talking to James might help him come up with answers to his questions, but he felt even more confused instead.

On Wednesday and Thursday, they were back to a quick scenting in the doorway before Remus left. Each day, the heavy feeling in Remus grew—into something sticky that wouldn’t unstick, no matter how hard he tried to poke at it. If only he understood the source of it, he might be able to do something about it.

On Friday, Remus decided to write to his friends for advice. He wrote a letter, then threw it in the bin. He took it back. He tore it up. He wrote a new letter, but then threw it in the bin.

They weren’t the kinds of friends who went to each other for advice. And they might not have anything to tell Remus anyway, since they were both omegas. They might not understand.

Instead of asking for help, Remus lay in bed, sniffing at his pillow that smelled of James and him. They were bonded. And Remus’s heart ached to be close to his mate.

On Saturday, Remus visited James for a scenting, as he did on Monday and Wednesday. Each time, James looked a little more subdued, as if he were a plant that was starting to droop, in urgent need of watering.

Remus felt the same.

They hadn’t talked about it, but they both knew that Remus had less than a week to decide what to do. Remus wondered when James would bring it up if he didn’t.

As Remus walked home from the Apparition point, he decided that things couldn’t continue the way they had been going. He needed to make a decision, and the only way he could make it was to properly talk to James. Maybe trust him a bit more.

Maybe show him where Remus lived.

Remus shuddered to think that he would show his home to an Auror, but since he had so far remained bonded to James, he might as well. If everything went belly up, he would have the pleasure of telling himself, *I told you so*. And if everything went fine...

So, on Friday, when James opened the door to his flat, Remus didn’t step in. James gave him a confused look. Remus took a deep breath, hoping it would calm the nausea that had been plaguing him all day.

“I want you to come with me,” he said. “I want you to come to my place.”

James stared for a long time, disbelief obvious on his face. After he got a hold of his feelings, he searched Remus’s face for something. Remus couldn’t decide if he hoped that James found something alarming and decided it was a bad idea to go, or that James found something encouraging that would get him moving faster.

“Okay,” James said then. “Just a minute.”

Remus stepped in to wait for James to get ready to go.

“Where do you live?” James asked as he put on his shoes. “You never said.”

“Bristol.”

“Oh. I don’t know why, but I somehow expected you to live in London or just outside.”

Remus shrugged.

“Do you live in a Muggle neighbourhood?” James asked as he started to put on a cloak, but then switched to a jacket. “Does Bristol even have a magical neighbourhood? It should, it’s a big city.”

“I don’t really know. It has a shopping street, so maybe.”

“So, you do live in a Muggle neighbourhood?”

Remus nodded.

“Is there an Apparition point nearby?” James asked. “I’m assuming you’re not connected to the Floo network?”

“There’s a spot. It’s about a ten-minute walk away. There’s also a magical pub with a Floo connection roughly the same distance away.”

James nodded. Remus tried not to think about how nice James’s flat was compared to his own.

“We’ll Floo,” he said.

He didn’t want to have to hold James close enough for Side-Along Apparition.

“We can use my Floo,” James said.

Remus nodded and followed James into the sitting room, from where they made their way to the Hopping Hippogriff in Bristol. James looked around curiously as they walked, and Remus wished that he could somehow delay the inevitable.

Sadly, the world never worked how he wanted it to, so they were soon entering the block of flats where he lived. James said nothing, but Remus saw him eyeing the worn-out exterior

and the chipping paint on the walls.

Remus lived on the third floor, and he was certain that the stairs had never required as much energy to get up as they now did. His hands were shaking as he unlocked his door. The hinges creaked as he opened it, and he stepped inside. James followed.

Remus switched the lights on, and he wasn't sure if it had been a good or a bad idea; on one hand, it made the flat seem less dingy, but on the other hand, it made the sorry state of his mismatched furniture very obvious. James looked around. Remus wondered what the flat looked like to him. Horribly shabby, most likely.

"It's cosy," James finally said.

He flashed a hesitant smile to Remus, who couldn't force his face to form a smile back. James shrugged off his jacket and hung it on the one free coat hook. Remus finally took off his own jacket as well, and hung it, very slowly, on a coat hook that was already holding a coat.

He turned to look at James. James was still looking around, taking in the horror that was Remus's flat. He pushed his fingers through his hair.

"Tea?" Remus asked.

"Oh, no. That's all right."

Of course he wouldn't want to drink from Remus's chipped cups. It had been stupid of Remus to ask, and his cheeks heated. James turned to look at him a bit too attentively to his tastes, so he turned to look at his bed. He then turned to look at his sofa. Where should he tell James to sit? The sofa was sagging in the middle, and sitting in it was uncomfortable, but his mattress was lumpy, and he wasn't sure he wanted James to know that he slept on a lumpy mattress, knowing how comfortable James's bed was.

Remus crossed his arms and glanced at James, who was still staring at him. Remus cleared his throat.

"So," James said.

"So," Remus said.

He hadn't decided where to tell James to sit. His eyes found the mating mark on James's neck instead. It had never seemed so alluring, and Remus had to battle hard to stay back rather than press his entire face against it.

"Remus?"

Remus looked up at James. James's face was soft, but Remus couldn't tell if it was pity. Some of it had to be pity.

"We need to visit the Registry on Tuesday," Remus said.

“Yes.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

James watched him thoughtfully, then nodded. Remus didn’t know what it meant.

“We should sit down and talk,” James said when the silence had stretched uncomfortably long.

Remus nodded and headed towards the sofa, then changed his mind and sat down on the bed instead. It might imply that he wanted something to happen, but maybe that was good. Maybe he did want something to happen. Maybe he needed for something to happen so that his thoughts would miraculously reorder themselves and he would finally know exactly what to do.

James hesitated, but then sat on the bed as well, a respectable distance away. Remus wanted him to be closer.

They said nothing. Remus didn’t know where to start, and James was staying true to his word and letting Remus talk when he was ready.

“Why were you not wearing your Auror robes when you visited the Registry?” Remus finally asked. “You weren’t even wearing your badge.”

“I had paperwork. We only wear the uniform when we interact with the public. And I took the badge off because I was off duty.”

“Aurors don’t usually take kindly to... to people like me.”

James sighed. “I know. It’s... I know, and I don’t condone that behaviour. It’s against everything we’re supposed to stand for.”

“Did your friend try to talk you out of mating with me?”

James looked confused for a moment, then said, “No. He... he was mostly concerned about the fact that we didn’t know if mating with a werewolf would be in any way different from mating with a...”

“A human.”

James opened his mouth, but Remus shook his head. He didn’t want to listen to James go on about how Remus was human, too. He wasn’t, and he never would be. That had been taken away from him when he had been four years old. He hadn’t been human in twenty-five years, and nothing James said was ever going to change that.

“Has it been different?” Remus asked.

“No, it’s exactly the same.”

James could be lying. But then, Remus didn't know why he would be. To make Remus feel better about himself? If James the Auror was up to something sinister, why would he try to build up Remus's self-confidence?

"Are all your friends Aurors?" Remus then asked.

"No, just Sirius. Of course, I'm friendly with my colleagues, but that's because we work together."

Remus nodded thoughtfully. The worries he'd had about James only knowing Aurors had been soothed, but he wasn't sure there was anything James could say that would stop the alarm bells in his head from constantly telling him that he was in the presence of an Auror.

"If," Remus said, turning his eyes to the floor. "If you're planning on arresting me for whatever reason, could you please do it now? If..."

He glanced at James, who was staring at him with his mouth open.

"Merlin, Remus," James finally said. "I'm not— Why would I want to arrest you? I'm not going to arrest you for any reason. Well, unless you're doing something illegal. But not—not just for existing."

"You could easily press charges for assault," Remus said. "Everyone would believe you."

"Fucking hell," James whispered and sighed. Then he said, "I'm not planning on arresting you. I'm not—I wouldn't. You're my mate. Even if you were doing something illegal, I might not find it in me to arrest you."

Remus looked at James. His expression appeared sincere, but how could Remus know?

"Was this," James asked, "some kind of test? Bringing me here? Are you testing me?"

"No. You could have looked up my address from the werewolf register any time you wanted to."

James's mouth made a little O, which most likely meant he hadn't thought about that. He hadn't planned on doing it. Had he really been ready to let Remus visit him for as long as it took before he would be comfortable enough to invite James over?

"Why didn't you tell me?" Remus asked. "Why didn't you tell me you're an Auror?"

"I'm sorry. I swear I thought I had told you. We were talking about our jobs, and I was certain I had told you."

James *had* tried to tell Remus about his job twice on the day they had first met, Remus remembered. It might have very well made James believe he had actually said it. Hell, even Remus had thought James had told him and he simply forgot.

Remus didn't think he could ask James anything else that would somehow convince him that staying bonded to him wasn't the worst idea he'd ever had, and he had missed James so much

over the past two weeks, even though they had met regularly and had been scenting each other. It felt insufficient, and Remus's heart yearned for James. He wanted to shuffle closer—no, he wanted to pounce, he wanted to wrap himself around his mate and remain there, always together, never apart.

Remus cleared his throat. James looked apprehensive.

"I don't know anything about children," Remus said. "I was never planning on being a parent. I didn't think I could..."

It was critical that James understood exactly what he was getting his son into.

"I'm going to screw up," Remus said. "And he's going to hate me. And you're going to hate me. And his mother is going to hate me, too. And I... I never wanted to expose a child to what I am. It's not safe."

"Why is it not safe?"

Remus frowned. He hadn't thought he'd need to spell it out for James. He had thought that a gentle reminder of what he was would be enough.

"Isn't it obvious?" he said. "I'm a beast. I'm not human, and it's... You haven't even seen—and then you'll hate me because it's disgusting and I'm sorry I got you into this mess. You should go back to the Registry and tell them you want someone else, and I'll... I guess I'll let them humiliate me as they pretend to look for a mate for me and then—I don't know what will happen. Maybe they will lock me away."

James shifted.

"I'm sorry," Remus said. "I don't want you to be with me out of pity. I'm sure there will be others willing to bond with me, and you shouldn't think about me, anyway. You should think about your family. And yourself. I shouldn't have let you bond with me. I'm sorry."

James was watching him as he spoke, and Remus felt heat creeping over his face. He didn't know where all the words had come from.

When it became obvious that Remus wasn't going to continue, James sighed.

"Do you regret bonding with me?" he asked. "I don't want you to tell me why I should regret it. I want you to tell me if you regret it."

"I regret putting you into this situation—"

"No. Do you regret bonding with me from your personal perspective?"

Was it a trick question? And even if it wasn't, Remus didn't know what to say.

Did he regret it?

If he allowed himself to be selfish and pretend, if only for a little while, that he was human, it would be easy for him to say that he didn't regret it. He might not know James very well yet, but if James was as nice as he had appeared over the past couple of weeks, Remus had found exactly the kind of mate he had always dreamed of.

But he wasn't human.

Shouldn't that be more important than Remus's feelings?

And what about James being an Auror? What if his boss found out he was bonded to a werewolf? Could they arrest Remus for that?

"Just your personal feelings, Remus," James said softly.

Remus should regret it. He should regret mating with an Auror. But if James was willing to overlook him being a werewolf, shouldn't he be able to overlook James being an Auror? Being an Auror wasn't as bad because one could change, one could choose another profession, but a werewolf could never choose to be human.

James was so kind. He was patient. He had given Remus the space he had needed, he had given Remus all the power in deciding whether to stay bonded to each other.

Remus glanced at his pillow.

"I don't regret it," he said, unsure whether it was true.

James nodded. Remus wondered if he had said the wrong thing.

"Good," James then said. "I don't regret it either. I like you a lot, and I would like for us to continue getting to know each other and strengthening our bond. I would like for you to become a permanent part of my life. I would like for you to be my family."

Remus leaned slightly closer to get a whiff of James's scent, but he wasn't sure what it told him. It smelled the same as it always did. Maybe a tad softer.

"And what about your son?" Remus asked. "Harry?"

"You don't have to meet him before you're ready," James said. "Obviously, I would like us to move in together at some point, and I would... I would very much like that to happen before Harry goes off to Hogwarts, but if... if you think it's impossible..."

It was impossible; there was no way Remus was going to insert himself into a young child's life any more than he already had by bonding with said child's father.

Remus shook his head. "I don't want to talk anymore."

"Okay. Time for scenting, then?"

Remus nodded. James made no move to start the scenting, so Remus shuffled closer to him, bringing their necks together. He squeezed his eyes shut, hoping that James would touch him,

would hold him close and never let go.

Sadly, they had to let go. Remus pulled back and looked at James's dazed smile. James always looked so happy after a scenting, and Remus wondered why it didn't affect him the same.

Was it because he wasn't human?

James's smile dropped when Remus shuffled back. He watched Remus's face intently for a moment.

"Remus," he then whispered. "Please, will you cuddle me?"

The whisper was quiet enough that Remus could pretend he hadn't heard. But his heart had heard it, and before he knew it, he had lost control of himself and pushed James down on the bed. James wrapped his arms around Remus and pulled him closer, and Remus settled against his chest, his arm thrown over James's body. He realised what he was doing when he slipped his leg between James's to bring their bodies even closer.

Remus froze. James had been stroking his back, but stopped. Remus could hear him sniff the air.

Remus had completely forgotten himself. He had allowed his instincts to control his actions, and he should never do that. Never.

It had happened because he had yet to have his yearly rut, but also because he had allowed himself to scent the damn pillow. He had known he should have stopped. He had known, yet he had still done it, and now he was out of control, pushing people around and pressing against them as if they were his.

James started stroking Remus's back again, slow and steady swipes of his hand travelling over his spine. He pressed his face against Remus's hair and inhaled, and Remus felt the horrible feeling in his gut unravelling after two weeks of having pestered him. James was breathing peacefully; Remus felt the up and down of his chest under his cheek. He turned his head to press his ear against James's chest and could hear his heart beating. It was calm. It was soothing.

Remus relaxed.

Chapter End Notes

I have two important notes to make here.

1) As I was reading through these earlier chapters, I noticed a small inconsistency in chapter 5, so I fixed that. Chapter 5 now says: "He hadn't been allowed to go to

Hogwarts, and even though he had attended Muggle school, his parents had forbidden him from getting close to anyone, so he'd had no real contacts with anyone his age."

2) I need to put writing this fic on hold until I've finished two fest fics and an original piece, since they all have deadlines. I have nearly finished writing chapter 12, and I have 1,2k of chapter 13 written, and a break means I'm going to very quickly reach the point where I haven't had time to properly edit the chapters yet. (And like, considering I only just noticed the inconsistency in a chapter I had read at least 10 times...) Anyway, I'm going to have to do something about my posting schedule, and I have two options at this point: a) I post every week until we reach chapter 10, after which I will take a 4-week break (unless I work super efficiently and can return earlier), or b) I switch to posting a chapter every two weeks, in which case I won't necessarily need to take a longer break after a certain point (probably after ch11). In both cases, I might still need to take a longer break later. In any case, I do welcome opinions on what you would like me to do about this, since it doesn't really matter to me which route I take. In any case, chapter 8 will be out next week.

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Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You seem much more relaxed,” was the first thing Sirius said as he stepped into James’s family room.

“I feel much more relaxed,” James said with a smile.

Sirius came to sit down next to him on the sofa and turned to look at him expectantly.

“Remus invited me to his place yesterday,” James said.

Sirius’s eyebrows went up.

“Yeah,” James said. “I wasn’t expecting that. The last time we saw each other, he hardly came in.”

“Well.” Sirius paused. “Where does he live?”

“He lives in a Muggle neighbourhood in Bristol. He has a flat. It’s... small.”

“How small?”

James turned to look at the wine he had set on the table. He should really pour them a glass.

“How small?” Sirius repeated.

“Very.”

James reached for the bottle and thought about Remus’s flat. He couldn’t say he hadn’t been surprised by how... bad it had been. James hadn’t been expecting anything grand, but the building itself was nearly derelict, and Remus’s flat, while very neat, was not in much better condition. His furniture was old as well. And he thought about the stinging scent of embarrassment that had been hovering around Remus since James had first opened the door for him, only getting stronger the closer they got to his flat. And the sudden spike in that scent when James had declined the offer of tea.

He should have said yes to tea, but he had been so nervous he hadn’t thought it was a good idea for him to be handling hot drinks.

It broke James’s heart to know that Remus was so ashamed of his home.

“So,” Sirius broke him out of his thoughts. “You went to visit him. Then what?”

“We talked. He asked me some questions. And apologised for letting me mate with him.”

“Why would he apologise?”

“I wasn’t expecting that,” James said and finally reached for the bottle of wine. “I thought if anything, he would expect me to apologise for mating with him even though I’m an Auror. Although, I suppose that doesn’t sound like Remus.”

James poured them both glasses of wine. Sirius immediately reached for his and drained it. James gave him a pointed look, but then filled it as Sirius held it out for a refill.

“I guess it all comes down to him being a werewolf,” James said. “He seems to think it’s worse than almost anything else in the world. Merlin, he asked me if I was planning on arresting him.”

Sirius’s hand froze before he could raise his glass to his lips, and his eyebrows shot up. James nodded, then took a sip of his wine.

“I’m still not sure what he’s thinking,” he said. “For now, at least, it appears that we’re staying bonded.”

“That’s good news, then,” Sirius said and gulped down his wine.

“Slow down, will you?”

Sirius shrugged and filled his glass.

“Well, anyway,” James said. “Then we scented, and he was so perfect again... And I asked him to cuddle me.”

“How did he take that? I thought you were going to let him make all the moves.”

James thought about sitting on Remus’s bed. The mattress had been lumpy and uncomfortable, but James’s attention had been diverted to the pillow that strongly smelled of their bond scent. Remus must have been scenting it, and if Remus had been scenting his pillow, it meant that Remus missed being close to him as much as he missed being close to Remus.

“He pushed me down,” James said dreamily. “Fuck, he’s such a strong alpha. He was perfectly in control of the situation, placing me where he wanted and then lay on top of me. Merlin, he smells so good when he doesn’t hold back.”

“You’re so gone for him.”

“No, I’m not!”

“Yes, you are. It’s cute.”

James glared, but then his face broke into a smile. He tried not to think about Remus suddenly freezing and his scent turning nervous again. After all, he had eventually relaxed.

“He was uncomfortable after the cuddling, though,” James said. “I hope that’s not a bad sign.”

“Mm.” Sirius took a gulp of his wine.

“I hope he decides to stay with me. I have such a good feeling about us.”

Sirius gave him a knowing smile.

“I guess he’ll have to give me a definite answer on Monday,” James said. “Since on Tuesday, we need to register our relationship.”

“I can’t believe he has the patience to deal with the Registry,” Sirius pulled a face. “I could never.”

“I wonder if I could go in alone to register. I’m not too keen on making Remus go there again.”

“I don’t see how that would be an issue.”

James drained his glass and poured more for both himself and Sirius. They delved into a conversation about the upcoming Quidditch World Cup, the bottle of wine was quickly drained and another brought in when suddenly, there was a knock on the door. James stumbled up and went to open it, only to come face to face with Remus.

“Oh, hello,” James said in surprise. “I wasn’t expecting you today.”

Remus bit his lip and looked around, wringing his hands. James waited.

“I wanted to talk to you,” Remus finally said.

“Sirius is here.”

Remus’s eyes widened, and he took a step back.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I wasn’t—I’ll just go. I’m sorry.”

“No! No, wait.” James reached out to Remus, then remembered himself and pulled his hand back. “Don’t go. I’ll send him away.”

“You don’t need to do that. I’m sorry.”

“Please. I want to... I want to talk to you instead.”

Remus watched him hesitantly, smelling nervous. James wondered why he never seemed to sniff out James’s scent. Maybe he knew how to be subtle about it.

“Come in,” James said. When Remus hesitated, he added, “Sirius will leave through the Floo.”

Remus didn't seem completely convinced and the nervousness in his scent strengthened, but before James could try to assure him, he stepped inside. James smiled, looking at him from head to toe. Remus was wearing Muggle clothes, as usual. He looked nice in Muggle clothes. When they had first met, Remus had been wearing robes, and he also looked nice in them. His hair was mousy brown and during their cuddling sessions, James had found several white hairs, and there was something very charming about that fact. Remus's eyes were very charming too, and always warm, no matter how withdrawn he was acting.

"Right," James said, eyes catching sight of the mating mark on Remus's neck. "I'll go tell Sirius to leave."

Before Remus could start apologising again, James turned around and hurried to the family room.

"Sirius, get out," he said, striding over to Sirius and pulling the glass of wine from his hand.

"What? Why?"

"Remus is here. I need to talk to him. You need to leave."

Sirius perked up. "Oh, but I want to meet him!"

"No! He's not ready to meet another Auror, for fuck's sake."

"You can't hide him forever."

"Oh, Merlin, you're drunk. Get the fuck out. I'll talk to you later."

Sirius pouted, but finally stood up. They headed to the sitting room, and Sirius turned towards the fireplace, but then he surged forward so that he could see into the hallway. James hurried to pull him away, hoping that Remus hadn't noticed.

"You didn't say he's short," Sirius whispered.

"He's not short!" James whispered back. "He's normal height. We are just tall, our perception is skewed."

Sirius giggled. James rolled his eyes.

"He does look like a librarian, though," Sirius whispered.

"Oh Merlin. Go!"

"He's not very cute," Sirius whispered as James shoved him towards the Floo. "Maybe ruggedly handsome at best."

James stopped trying to guide him away. "Are you calling my mate ugly?"

"No, wait a second, Jim. I said no such thing."

“Don’t fucking call me Jim,” James said out loud. “Get out.”

“Oh, were you genuinely offended?” Sirius asked, his expression turning serious. “I didn’t mean it.”

“Out.”

Sirius raised his hands in surrender and finally took the last few steps to the Floo.

“We will discuss this,” he said as he took a handful of Floo powder.

“I don’t know that I want to.”

“Oh, come on! I didn’t mean it.” Sirius’s voice was whiny.

“Just go.”

Sirius gave James an exasperated look, then threw the Floo powder into the fireplace, and was finally gone. James sighed in relief, then spent a moment collecting himself before heading to Remus.

Remus had taken his jacket off but hadn’t put it away.

“Sorry about that,” James said as he walked over to Remus to take his jacket to hang it up. “We were having a bit of wine, and Sirius is impossible when he’s drinking.”

Only then did he realise maybe he shouldn’t have approached Remus so casually and taken his clothes, but there hadn’t been a spike of anything bitter in Remus’s scent, so perhaps it had been fine.

“I’m sorry for interrupting,” Remus said.

“Don’t worry about it. I can have a drink with Sirius any time.”

James led Remus towards the sitting room, but then changed his mind; Remus was his mate, and he didn’t want to be so formal with him any longer, so he guided Remus to the family room instead. He hadn’t bothered to clean it up particularly well since he had only expected Sirius’s visit, but Remus was his mate; he shouldn’t need to keep up appearances with him. He did, however, take out his wand to clear out the wine bottle and the glasses.

Remus looked around with curiosity, eyes focusing on the forgotten toys on the floor, the disorganised shelves of children’s books in the bookcase, and finally, the collection of Harry’s drawings on the wall.

“You’re not very drunk, are you,” Remus said.

“No, no. Not at all. Well, a bit tipsy. Sirius drank most of the first bottle.”

Remus nodded and gazed around. He stopped to look at the photos on the side table, but didn’t go closer.

“Would you like a drink?” James asked, uncertain what he was supposed to do.

Remus shook his head. “No, thank you.”

James hesitated for a moment, then sat down on the sofa. Remus watched the photos for a moment longer before joining James. He sat closer than James had expected, and James’s heart skipped a beat.

“What did you want to talk about?” he asked.

Remus looked around the room. He remained quiet for a long time.

“I don’t know,” he finally said.

James didn’t know what to do. What to say. Did Remus want him to start a conversation? But how could he know what Remus would like to talk about? Should they talk about their relationship or something else?

Should he have offered Remus tea?

“I just,” Remus said, “wanted to see you.”

James’s heart fluttered. His mate wanted to see him!

“What a coincidence,” he said before he could stop himself. “I wanted to see you too.”

Remus finally looked at him. His expression was apprehensive, but not as closed off as it had been over the past couple of weeks. James felt a silly grin take over his face and hoped that Remus found it charming rather than creepy.

“Can we scent?” Remus asked.

The question took James completely by surprise, and he spent an embarrassingly long moment trying to process Remus’s words.

“Yes,” he then hurried to say before Remus could take it back.

Remus waited. James wanted him to grip his hair and pull it to expose his neck. He wanted Remus to act possessive and kiss the mating mark on his neck before pressing their glands together. Instead, Remus waited.

James leaned his head to the side. Remus’s gaze fell on his mating mark, and James could see something flash in his eyes. It flashed in his scent too, and it was delicious. If only Remus would let go.

Remus shuffled closer and raised his hand to place it behind James’s head. After the first hesitant touch, Remus dug his fingers into James’s hair, careful not to pull, and he guided James closer, aligning their mating marks and touching James’s neck with his own. The moment their glands touched, James sighed in relief, sparks of pleasure travelling down his spine as Remus rubbed their skins together.

Remus pressed closer, his warm body now properly against James, and James placed a palm against his back. The hand in James's hair tightened minutely, and Remus rubbed his gland against James's with more intent. Their scents were swirling around them, blending into something that made James's heart feel light.

Remus placed his free hand on James's hip, making James's cock grow harder. He would have gladly stayed there, in Remus's embrace, waiting for Remus to notice the arousal in his scent and do something about it, but he reminded himself of Remus's nerves and the fact that they had yet to explicitly agree that they were staying together. He placed a hand behind Remus's head and stopped him from rubbing their glands together. They were both breathing hard.

They sat still for a long time. Their breathing grew slower. James inhaled Remus's scent which had an undercurrent of arousal in it, and wondered if maybe it meant that Remus felt at least moderately safe with him or if it was only a physical reaction to their scenting.

Finally, James pulled away, leaving behind Remus's warmth. There was a flicker of something in Remus's scent, but James wasn't sure what it was. It felt like disappointment, but he couldn't be certain. Maybe it meant that Remus wanted to stay physically close to him.

"Cuddles?" James asked.

Remus nodded immediately, then blushed, embarrassment taking over his sweet scent.

"It's okay to want to cuddle," James said. "You know that, right?"

Remus seemed to be about to shake his head, then nodded instead. His scent wasn't convinced, but James didn't think there was anything he could do about it. He opened his arms for Remus, who pressed closer. James had hoped that Remus might have another bout of courage when James asked for cuddles, but it seemed he was determined to restrain himself.

Maybe it was the fact that they had cuddled only the previous day; they weren't as starved for closeness as they had been, but that didn't mean James didn't crave it. Being separated from his new mate for nearly two weeks had taken its toll on him, and he closed his eyes to focus on feeling Remus against him. In his arms. His mate, with him. The longer they stayed together, the easier it was for him to start pushing away the horrible ache that had plagued him until only the previous day.

"I'm sorry it went like this," he said against Remus's hair. "We shouldn't have cared about what the Registry told us. We should have taken things slower. Get to know each other properly. And I'm sorry that your first time being bonded to someone got off to such a horrible start. It should have been happy. It should have been us getting to know each other, body and soul, and I'm sorry it didn't work out that way."

Remus said nothing, but James could have sworn that he snuggled a little bit closer.

"It's been painful," James said. "And I can only imagine how painful it has been for you. I only know how much it hurt me to realise you were afraid of me. My own mate. Afraid of

me. And knowing there was nothing I could do to change that. It hurt me that I failed my duty as your mate.”

Remus didn’t outwardly react to his words, but his scent lightened up.

“I imagine it’s been even worse for you,” James said. “You had to deal with a huge shock—two huge shocks. And on top of that, there were the physical effects of not spending enough time with your new mate. And I’m really sorry that I put you in that position. I hope your friends were able to help you like Sirius has helped me.”

There was a new emotion in Remus’s scent, and James had no idea what it meant. It made him think of regret, but that wasn’t exactly it. Remus shifted. James held him more tightly, even though he worried it might scare Remus.

Remus’s scent would tell him. It would.

“I don’t want to break our bond,” Remus whispered.

James’s heart skipped a beat. He was trying not to get his hopes up. He might have heard incorrectly, simply his hopeful imagination putting words in Remus’s mouth.

“I feel stupid,” Remus said. “Everything tells me that I should get as far away from you as I can. But…”

James’s stomach dropped at the idea that *everything* was telling Remus to stay away. Was there truly nothing that would make him more comfortable? But he had also said he didn’t want to break their bond. He had definitely said that.

“I don’t want to break our bond,” Remus said. “Do you think… is it caused by our bond?”

“No. No, the bond causes instinctual behaviour, but it doesn’t override your wants. If the bond caused you to be unable to decide for yourself, you wouldn’t have been able to stay so distant from me right after we had mated. Your instincts are just suggestions. It’s up to you to decide whether you listen.”

Remus said nothing to that.

“If the bond overrode your free will, I would have never been able to end my previous relationship,” James said. “Mates would never break up, and I’m sure you know that happens quite often.”

Remus sighed.

“You still have a couple more days to think,” James said.

“I think I’ve already decided.”

James leaned his head down to press his face against Remus’s hair. He smelled nervous but certain.

“I’m glad,” James said. “You make me happy.”

Remus said nothing, but his scent rippled with something sweet.

“We should discuss this again on Monday,” James said. “Oh, also, I’ve been thinking that I could go to the Registry alone and ask them if you need to come in as well or if it’s enough that I register our relationship for both of us. I don’t want you to have to deal with their prejudices if at all possible.”

“That would be nice.”

James smiled at the note of relief in Remus’s scent.

“I’ll let you know if you do need to go in,” James said.

Remus was quiet for a while.

“Thank you,” he then said against James’s chest.

“You’re welcome.”

James felt a tightness inside him release. Remus remained quiet, but James found it was okay. They didn’t need to talk. He adjusted their position to be more comfortable. Remus’s scent was settling, his breathing was becoming slower and heavier, and once his scent lost the constant undercurrent of nervousness, James realised Remus had fallen asleep in his arms.

Remus asleep was the most precious gift James could have ever asked for, and he felt a powerful urge to make sure nothing touched Remus while he slept. He curled towards him, as if trying to curl completely around him to shield him from any potential harm, no matter how unlikely it was that anything harmful would materialise in James’s family room. He stroked Remus’s back slowly, but that was the only movement he was willing to make before Remus woke up.

Remus was warm and relaxed, his left hand resting against James’s chest, and James hoped that he could get used to it. That as their bond strengthened, Remus would continue to find James safe enough to sleep around, that one day, Remus asleep against him would be completely mundane.

James wondered if Remus had been sleeping poorly. It wouldn’t surprise him, knowing how difficult the past weeks had been for him; it must have been equally hard on Remus, probably even more so.

Also, James couldn’t imagine anyone getting a good night’s sleep on Remus’s lumpy mattress.

How come Remus lived in such poverty? He had a stable job, and even though James didn’t know how much money librarians made, he assumed it would be enough to provide more to Remus. Were the rents that high in Bristol? Surely not in a building of *that* condition.

Did Remus have no one who would help him? What about his family? Remus hadn't mentioned any family members during their conversation, but then, they hadn't had that many conversations yet. James had forgotten to tell him he had a son—it was not at all unlikely that Remus simply hadn't talked about his family yet.

The fabric of Remus's henley was soft under James's hand, and his back rose and fell slowly as he breathed. James had missed having a mate, had missed being able to hold someone, missed feeling a surge of protectiveness over a person. His person.

Harry, of course, awakened similar instincts of protection and love in him, but it wasn't the same. It was the knowledge that his mate could very well take care of themselves but chose to let him take care of them, that they chose each other to have and to hold, that they placed such trust in each other not out of necessity but because they wanted to.

James looked at the way Remus's hair curled slightly at the ends. Maybe it would be wavy if Remus let it grow longer.

If James were to be honest with himself, he would admit that Remus falling asleep in his arms was probably due to Remus being exhausted rather than feeling safe with him. A worry he hadn't liked to word was floating to the forefront of his mind, and as he looked at Remus's sleeping face, he wondered if Remus had only chosen him because he thought no one else would want him. Remus had said that the Registry wouldn't have a list for him, although he had also said that they would find someone willing to mate with him.

But he had only said that because he was trying to make James break their bond.

Had Remus decided to stay bonded to him because he thought he couldn't find someone else? Someone who was not an Auror? James was sure Remus still felt the same about Aurors as he had before, so how had he decided to stay with James? Would it be a thing they never talked about? Should James make sure never to wear his Auror robes around Remus?

They had hurried into the mating way too fast. They should have taken things slower, no matter what the Registry said. James should have gone back and told them to give them more time because they couldn't expect complete strangers to mate with each other.

Yet that was exactly what he and Remus had done.

As much as James liked Remus, and as happy as he was to have found him, he could still admit that they had made a mistake mating before having gone on even one proper date.

He sighed. His eyelids were getting heavy, but he refused to sleep; he needed to protect his mate. Remus was warm and soft, and James inhaled his scent that, for once, was void of any negative feelings.

Remus slept for nearly an hour. James could immediately tell when he woke up because his scent spiked with fear and his body stiffened. James was happy that the fear quickly turned into embarrassment and mild nervousness instead.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked, pulling back a bit to see Remus's face.

Remus didn't meet his eyes, but nodded. His cheek was still pressed against James's chest.

"I think you needed it," James said. "I'm sure the past couple of weeks have taken their toll."

"I suppose," Remus muttered.

He still smelled sleepy, and it made James's heart soar. He gave Remus a little kiss on the forehead.

Remus pulled back and yawned, wiping his eyes with the hand that had been resting against James's chest just a moment ago. James already missed its warmth.

"I'm sorry," Remus said.

"What? Why?"

"For... falling asleep like that. I shouldn't have."

"You don't need to apologise for that. You were tired, and honestly, I quite liked having you all relaxed around me. It made me feel protective, and that always feels nice when you're freshly bonded. Makes you feel useful."

A small frown appeared between Remus's brows before he sat up, leaving behind a cold, Remus-shaped spot. He blinked his eyes slowly and yawned again, not turning back to James.

"Do you want to come again tomorrow?" James asked. "Or should we reschedule to Monday, since we scented today? We should meet up on Monday in any case and make sure that you still want to keep this bond."

"Do you want to keep it?"

Remus's voice was quiet, and he was looking away. James sat up.

"I do," he said. "But you could find someone else."

"Do you not want me?"

"Of course I want you."

Remus merely nodded.

"Of course I do," James repeated.

Remus said nothing. He sat still, and James didn't know what to say, so he remained quiet as well. Then Remus stood up.

"I should go," he said. "I'll see you on Monday."

"Sure."

They didn't say anything else as James guided Remus to the hall. He waited for Remus to put on his shoes and his jacket. As Remus straightened up, James got the unbearable urge to kiss him. It was such a strong urge that Remus must have noticed it in his scent, but Remus simply stood there, looking at James's ear. He was biting his lip, muscles stiff. Then he leaned forward, ever so slightly, scent brightening, and James's heart skipped a beat.

Remus was going to kiss him!

Except then Remus forcefully pulled back and immediately turned to the door.

"I'll see you on Monday," he said to the door.

"Yes." James paused. "See you then."

And Remus opened the door and walked out, and soon, James could hear the distinct pop of Disapparition.

Chapter End Notes

I've decided to change my posting schedule, so from now on, I'll post a new chapter every two weeks instead of every week. That might give me enough time to figure out the chapters 12 and onward, so I might not need to take a longer break. But who knows, because I was kind of hoping to finish this fic in chapter 15, but I've found myself drafting chapter 17, so this fic is definitely in charge here and not me.

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Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

On Wednesday morning, Remus was just zipping up his jacket, on his way to work, when there was a knock on the door. He opened it only to come face to face with two burly Aurors.

“Remus Lupin?” one said.

“Yes.”

“You’re coming with us.”

Remus glanced at his bag, then decided to leave it. There was no way he was going to have time to go to work that day, and asking to take it with him might be seen as resistance. So, he merely stepped out and closed the door, glad that he at least had his wand with him.

The Aurors Side-Along Apparated him to a dank alley, then walked him towards a solid wall. They were walking one on each side of Remus, holding his biceps, and Remus did his best to match their pace so that they couldn’t claim he was resisting or trying to escape. They walked straight through the bricks and arrived at the familiar corridor that Remus had already seen way too many times when he had been brought in for questioning for no good reason. The walk was long, along several winding corridors, down several sets of stairs, and Remus spent the time focusing on his breathing and achieving the calm state he needed when dealing with Aurors.

They eventually arrived at the lobby of the Ministry Detention Area, and Remus was walked straight to the reception desk.

“Empty your pockets,” one of the Aurors said.

Remus did. He wasn’t carrying much: a few coins of Muggle money, a crinkled receipt, his keys, and his wand.

“Jacket,” one of the Aurors said, and Remus took off his jacket before handing it over.

The Auror working at the reception desk put everything in a container before tapping it with her wand and sending it away.

Without saying a word, the two Aurors guided Remus forward, into a circular corridor that was also very familiar to him. They were taking him to be interrogated—he simply didn’t know why.

They stopped in a room that only had a table and three chairs in it. Remus kept a polite smile on his face, making sure to show that he was listening to what they said, and eventually, they left him alone in the room with the strict instructions to sit in a chair and not move. He settled in the chair and placed his hands on the table so that they were visible.

Remus wondered what was going on. It wasn't the first time he had been detained, but they had never come to pick him up from home. No, the other times he had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and because he had to disclose to law enforcement that he was a werewolf or risk punishment, he had then been brought in for questioning. This time was the fifth.

Because they had fetched him from home, they had been looking for him specifically, but Remus couldn't even begin to guess what he might have done that would have aroused the Aurors' interest. He had taken care of his yearly check-in with the Beast Division in time, and as far as he was aware, he hadn't done anything that might have been viewed as a crime—apart from existing in the first place, of course.

He refused to think about James and his position as an Auror because that was bound to disturb his calm.

He didn't know how long he waited, but that was also familiar. He let his mind wander enough to keep himself occupied, but not so much that it broke his calm façade. He needed to be deep in his calmness by the time he was interrogated.

His musings were interrupted by the door finally opening. An Auror carrying a file stepped in. He opened the file, frowned, turned to look at Remus, and paused. He was very tall, had long dark hair, and his eyes were piercingly grey. Without a word, he turned around and left the room.

It had never happened before, and Remus found it difficult to stay calm. Chances were the Auror had read in the file that he was about to be in a closed space with an alpha werewolf and went to request backup, but usually, the Aurors had been more prepared when it came to dealing with Remus and usually came in pairs. Remus's calmness was seriously cracking by the time the door opened again and the same Auror stepped in, this time closing the door and walking up to Remus.

"Hello," he said. "I'm Sirius Black."

He offered his hand to Remus. Remus stared at it.

He was Sirius Black. There was no way several people would name their child Sirius, which meant that James's best friend was Sirius Black. It made sense, now that Remus thought about it, since the Potters had taken him in when he had been disinherited; Remus simply hadn't known that the eldest Black heir was called Sirius.

Cautiously, Remus lifted his right hand from the table and shook hands with Auror Black, who seemed pleased by this, and sat down in a chair, dropping the file onto the table. He leaned back, pushed his hair behind his shoulder, and smiled.

"I did not expect our first meeting to be in an interrogation room," he said. "But it's still nice to meet you. James speaks highly of you."

Remus could only stare. He forced himself to nod so as not to appear uncooperative. Auror Black sighed and flicked the file open.

“Do you actually know why you’re here?” he asked, and turned to look at Remus with his piercing eyes.

“No,” Remus said through his constricting throat, wondering if a negative answer could somehow be used against him.

“Didn’t think so,” Auror Black muttered. Then he said, “It appears that the Registry cunts hold a grudge against you.”

Remus’s brows shot up. Nothing about the situation in any way resembled his usual visits to the Ministry interrogation rooms, and he was growing increasingly certain that Auror Black was, perhaps, not taking the situation very seriously.

“I’m supposed to interrogate you about why you haven’t complied with the Alpha Mating Registry’s directions of either registering a mate or signing up for their services, but,” Auror Black said lazily, “I’m pretty sure I already know the whole story.”

Remus merely stared.

“Sadly, I’m going to need a statement, anyway,” Auror Black said, pulling out a blank piece of parchment. “My personal, non-professional advice to you would be not to comment until you have discussed with your lawyer.”

Remus shook his head.

“You don’t have a lawyer?” Auror Black asked. “No worries, James’s lawyers are very good.”

Remus shook his head again. “No, I’ll give a statement.”

Auror Black paused and considered him for a moment. Remus was afraid to meet his eyes.

“All right,” Auror Black said then. “Do you want to write it yourself, or shall I?”

He groped around his pocket for a moment before pulling out a quill and an inkwell. Remus wondered what he should do.

He had always written his own statements to make sure that the Aurors didn’t add in things that weren’t true and that they would then most likely refuse to change, forcing him to sign a confession he hadn’t made. However, his muscles were unusually stiff—both because of the nerves and because of the approaching full moon—and he wasn’t sure his fingers were fully functional at that moment. It would lead to his handwriting being horrible, and that might be something to be used against him.

Auror Black was offering the quill to Remus, but when Remus made no move to take it, he pulled the parchment closer to him.

“Let’s see, then,” he said, dipping the quill in the ink. “I might not have all the details since I’m going to have to work with what James has told me, so do let me know if I’m wrong about something. I suppose the main thing is that you have actually complied with what the

Registry told you to do, and you have been there to see them. Do you remember the exact date? No, wait. It was James's birthday, since that's when he went and you two met there."

Auror Black wrote something down. The way he wrote seemed awfully posh, although it was difficult to tell upside-down if his handwriting reflected the way he used the quill.

"The very next day James told me you were going to bond," Auror Black said, continuing to write as he spoke, "and you two mated the day after that. So, within two days of your visit to the Registry, you had mated. Correct?"

Auror Black turned to look at Remus, who nodded.

"And since then, you have been taking care of the bond as you should," Auror Black said, "meaning that it has grown into a stable bond. You and your mate agreed that he would visit the Registry to register your relationship, and while there, he would ask them if it was enough or if you needed to visit as well. Is that right?"

Remus nodded again.

"And did you see James yesterday at all?"

Remus nodded.

"What did he say about the Registry?"

"He—he said that he had registered the relationship, and they told him it was all in order and I didn't need to go in."

Auror Black nodded and wrote something down.

"He brought back paperwork," Remus whispered, and his heart sank.

What if that paperwork contained something that said Remus should have gone in?

"Did you read it?" Auror Black asked.

Remus shook his head. Auror Black wrote something down.

"And," he said, turning to look at Remus, "you didn't want to go back there because they had been treating you unfairly due to your condition?"

Remus bit his lip, and his shoulders stiffened. Auror Black was holding the quill above the parchment, ready to write it down, when Remus shook his head. Auror Black frowned.

"I don't want it written there," Remus said.

Auror Black lowered the hand holding the quill.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "It would look better if you had an obvious reason not to want to deal with them. And discrimination, although technically not illegal in this case, would be a

very good reason not to want to go.”

Remus shook his head.

“All right,” Auror Black said, and picked up the quill again. “What should I put here as the reason, then?”

“I... I was very busy at work and couldn’t go.”

Auror Black hesitated for a moment, and Remus wasn’t sure if he wanted him to simply write it down and move on or argue with Remus. Remus had never lied in any of his statements. Would Auror Black make a note of the lie? Was Remus going to get in more trouble?

Auror Black wrote something.

“So,” he said, eyeing the parchment. “In summary, you did comply with the Alpha Mating Registry’s instructions and were under the impression that it was enough for your mate to register the relationship because they already knew you were going to mate with him.”

Remus nodded. Auror Black wrote something, then turned the parchment around and pushed it towards Remus.

“Give that a read and then sign it if you think the information is correct and there’s nothing to add,” Auror Black said. Then, after a moment’s hesitation, added, “It’s not too late for me to incinerate that.”

Remus pulled the parchment closer and read through what Auror Black had written. His handwriting really was awfully posh, and the language used was succinct. He had only written what he had said he would, adding nothing and leaving nothing out. Remus took a deep breath, then took the quill and stiffly signed the statement.

“Thank you,” Auror Black said as Remus pushed it back to him. “Now we’ll just have to wait for James to return from wherever he is.”

“Why?”

“We need to bring your mate in to testify that you are, in fact, bonded. He was out, so I left him a note. Let’s hope he’s not working on anything too complicated.”

James needed to come in to testify?

Testify.

It was suddenly sinking in that Remus had been brought in, not because he had been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but because he had been outright accused of breaking the law. No; he *had* broken the law because he hadn’t gone to the Registry to register his relationship.

“Am I in big trouble?” he asked before he could stop himself.

Auror Black leaned back in his chair and pushed his hair behind his shoulder. Remus wondered what the punishment for breaking the Alpha Mating Law would be.

“I don’t think so,” Auror Black said. “If they told James that you didn’t need to go in, it’s obviously their fault. It’s pretty common for alphas to forget to register their relationship in time, and it’s never a big issue once we establish that they are bonded to someone. It’ll be fine once James gets here. Don’t worry.”

Auror Black flashed Remus a smile. Remus didn’t even attempt to return it.

“There’s going to be a report about this in my file permanently, isn’t there?” he said.

Auror Black shrugged.

“It’s going to say that I broke the law, isn’t it?” Remus said quietly.

Auror Black’s eyes widened, and he straightened up. After a moment’s thought, he said, “Funny thing happened. I lost all paperwork relating to this case, so we can’t put anything in your file.”

Remus felt weak.

“You should put it in my file,” he whispered.

“I swear”—Auror Black leaned forward—“that no one is going to be able to blame it on you. If you really want me to, I will not do it. If you genuinely think it’s better that you will always have that report there, knowing how that’s going to affect the way you’re treated when you will eventually be brought in again for no reason whatsoever... If you want me to, I will file the papers on this case correctly. But I swear to you that I know how to get rid of them without implicating you in any way.”

Was Auror Black testing Remus? He might be best friends with James, but he was still an Auror. Was this merely a way for the Aurors to see if Remus was willing to commit more crimes? He was now a part of a criminal conspiracy, wasn’t he?

“Tell me no and I won’t do it,” Auror Black said.

Remus said nothing.

Maybe he was being set up, but he was, in fact, willing to take that risk when it might lead him to be free of any reports of law-breaking. And if it was a setup, it wouldn’t matter because he had already broken one law, and he was fully aware that werewolves didn’t receive justice. Having a single stain on his criminal record was enough to change his life forever.

“Tell me no,” Auror Black said.

Remus said nothing, merely looked at him. Auror Black searched his face for something, then nodded and leaned back in his chair again.

Was this what it was like to have friends in high places? Remus didn't much like the idea of only being let off the hook because he happened to know the right people, but he shouldn't be in the mess in the first place. Surely he shouldn't need to feel guilt over having someone fix an issue someone else had caused.

Remus's feelings were getting out of control, so he focused on his breathing again. He needed to stay calm.

"So," Auror Black said. "I hear you work in a library."

Remus nodded, looking through Auror Black as he focused on finding his usual calmness.

"You're missing work to be here, aren't you?"

Remus nodded.

"Well, hopefully you can get out of here soon enough and make it to work for the rest of the day."

Remus nodded.

Auror Black went quiet. He shifted in his chair. Remus wondered if his silence counted as being uncooperative—the Aurors had such different understandings of what was resistance and what wasn't that Remus never knew how much he needed to actually talk to keep them happy.

Auror Black pulled Remus's file closer and opened it. Remus continued breathing, sinking further into his calm state. Auror Black was reading through the reports in Remus's file. He tutted.

"Admits to being a werewolf," he muttered. "Fuck that."

He had just started reading the third report when the door to the room clattered open. He started and turned to look at James, who was standing in the doorway, wearing Auror robes. Remus watched James take in the scene, his expressions shifting quickly until it settled into a worried frown, and he strode closer.

"Remus," he said. "I'm so sorry. I can't believe I didn't make sure they processed your file as well as mine."

"It's okay."

James opened his mouth, then paused to sniff the air. His frown deepened, but he said nothing. He then turned to Auror Black.

"What do I need to do?" he asked.

Auror Black had already produced a blank piece of parchment and pushed the quill and inkwell towards James.

“Just write a statement that says Remus is your mate,” he said. “And maybe add in that the Registry told you it was all taken care of.”

“How do you know that?” James asked, picking up the quill.

“Remus’s statement says so.”

James paused, the quill halfway to the inkwell. He looked between Remus and Auror Black, then dipped the quill in the ink.

“You gave a statement, Remus?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“You should have waited to have a lawyer present.”

James pressed the quill on the parchment and started writing, so Remus said nothing.

“And you,” James said, pointing the quill to Auror Black before continuing to write, “should have told him to wait.”

“I did tell him.”

James paused, then continued writing. His handwriting was more of a scribble compared to Auror Black’s, but still somehow posh.

Remus wondered how on earth he had ended up in such posh company.

“There,” James said, hastily signing his statement and handing it to Auror Black. “Remus, why did you give a statement without a lawyer?”

“I don’t have a lawyer.”

“I would have taken care of that. You know that, right? Sirius told you, right?”

“It’s okay.”

Remus glanced at James, who looked increasingly frustrated.

“It’s not okay,” James said. “It’s not too late yet. I’ll call one of my lawyers—”

“No, thank you.”

James blinked. “No? What do you mean, no?”

“It’s not necessary.”

“Remus, it’s not good for you to just give statements with no legal assistance.”

“It’s fine.”

“How can you say it’s fine? If your statement is worded incorrectly, it might incriminate you!”

“It’s okay.”

James swayed in his spot. Auror Black collected the two statements and put them in Remus’s file. Remus wondered if he had lied about destroying the paperwork. He breathed calmly.

“I really think you should consult with a lawyer,” James said.

“No, thank you.”

“Remus!”

“Yes?”

He could smell James’s scent thickening as he leaned against the desk.

“Just talk to my lawyer,” James said. “Please.”

“No, thank you.”

“No! I won’t let you do this to yourself.”

Remus bristled at that, but it was okay. He was used to being told he was incapable of taking care of himself. James was just another Auror hoping to get a rise out of him.

“I’m fine, thank you,” he said.

“James,” Auror Black said before James could continue. “I think you should drop it.”

James turned to glare at Auror Black. Remus watched them with a pleasant sense of detachment. It was good. It meant that he had achieved the calm he needed.

“How can you tell me to drop it?” James asked. “You know very well—”

“James.”

James growled, then snapped his mouth shut and pushed away from the table.

“Is he free to go now, then?” he asked.

“Yes,” Auror Black said and stood up. “Technically, you should wait until I’ve taken care of things with the Registry, but I don’t think it’s necessary.”

“I’ll wait,” Remus said.

James opened his mouth, but Auror Black gestured for him to stay quiet. He glared, but closed his mouth without saying anything.

“I’ll be quick,” Auror Black said, headed towards the door, but then returned and grabbed James’s arm. “I’ll take James with.”

James started to protest, but Auror Black pulled him out of the room and closed the door. Remus stayed where he was, sighed, and then focused on breathing again.

It appeared that he was going to need more patience than usual with James around, so he focused solely on breathing and staying in his calm state. He didn’t know how long it took before the door opened and Auror Black peeked in.

“It’s all taken care of,” he said. “You’re free to leave.”

Remus rose slowly, keeping his hands visible. He walked over to the door.

“James is waiting in the lobby,” Auror Black said. “Here’s your paperwork from the Registry.”

Remus took the wad of parchment and folded it neatly. Auror Black walked next to him without holding him. It was the first time ever that he was walking around the Ministry Detention Area without someone squeezing his bicep with unnecessary force.

An Auror turned into the corridor, his eyes narrowing.

“Oi, Black,” he said. “Isn’t that the alpha werewolf you were dealing with?”

“Yes.” Auror Black’s voice was clipped.

“Do you need a hand with it?”

“No, I think I can manage just fine. He’s free to leave.”

The Auror scoffed at that, but didn’t stop to insist.

James was standing in the lobby, arms crossed over his chest and a dark expression on his face. He didn’t approach Remus, and Remus wondered what Auror Black had told him to make him stay away.

“Remus Lupin,” Auror Black told the receptionist.

The receptionist waved his wand, but the only thing that happened was that the small crystal ball on the desk lit up red. It always happened. Remus assumed it signified that the person being released was a werewolf. The receptionist gave Remus a suspicious glance before standing up and heading into the next room. He soon returned with the box that held Remus’s things.

Auror Black was nonchalantly leaning on the counter and watching James brood. The receptionist opened the box. He took out Remus’s jacket and placed his coins on the counter, followed by the crinkled receipt and his keys. He then picked up the wand.

“Are you permitted to use this?” he asked.

“Yes,” Remus said.

“And you’ve received all the necessary education?”

“Yes.”

The receptionist looked at Remus from head to toe and raised his brows. Auror Black shifted, but remained quiet. Later, once he was less detached from the situation, Remus would appreciate it.

“I’m not sure I believe you,” the receptionist said. “I think we need Hogwarts records. It’s going to take a couple of hours to find the correct papers.”

“I did not attend Hogwarts.”

The receptionist smirked.

“I see,” he said. “Did you lie about having the education needed to carry a wand?”

“No, I did receive education.”

“Probably not up to standard—”

“What going on?” James asked, storming closer.

The receptionist turned to look at him, taken aback.

“Are you accusing my mate of something?” James asked, stopping by the reception desk.

The receptionist glanced at Auror Black, who had turned to look at him now that James had approached.

“No,” the receptionist finally said, and handed the wand to Remus.

“Unbelievable,” James muttered, swiping the coins off the counter before giving them to Remus, who took them in a shaking hand.

Calm. He needed to remain calm.

“Let’s go,” James said.

“I’ll see you later,” Auror Black said, smiled at Remus, and then headed away.

Remus started towards the exit, which was located at the back of the room, as far away from the entrance as it could be. James followed him, mumbling to himself all the while. Remus tuned him out.

James followed Remus all the way home. His mood had not lightened, and if Remus hadn’t still been so deep in his calmness, he might have been apprehensive about letting him in because an angry Auror was never good.

“Tea?” Remus asked as he took off his jacket.

From the moment he had stepped in, Remus’s calm state had started cracking. Removing his jacket was like removing a part of his armour, and his hands started shaking again. He took a step towards the kitchenette, but was stopped by James placing a heavy hand on his shoulder.

“I’m going to sue the Registry,” James said.

“Don’t do that.”

“They did that on purpose! They lied to me just to have an excuse to have you arrested! I’m not going to let such obvious discrimination go unpunished—”

“It’s not illegal.”

James’s hold of Remus’s shoulder tightened. Remus’s calm continued to crack.

“I’m sure it can be worked into discrimination against me,” James said. “I’m not a werewolf, so it is illegal, and—”

“No.”

James tightened his hold of Remus’s shoulder as Remus straightened his back.

“What?” James asked.

“I said no.”

Remus turned to look at James, dislodging his hand from his shoulder, and lifted his head high.

“You will not make a fuss,” Remus said. “It has been taken care of, and you will leave it be.”

James opened his mouth.

“We are not discussing this,” Remus said before he could speak.

James closed his mouth and swallowed, his eyes wide and scent thickening. That was what made Remus realise what he had done; that he had, once again, allowed his nature to show without restraint, and now James was scared of him and would probably arrest him.

“Remus,” James said, voice cracking.

“I’m sorry.”

“Remus.” James stepped closer. “Please, kiss me.”

Remus blinked, but before he could spiral, James had stepped up to him and pulled him into a kiss. Without thinking, Remus clung to him, grabbing fistfuls of his robes. James’s scent was thick, his lips were smooth, and his nose pressed painfully against Remus’s before he pulled

back, hands on Remus's cheeks. He looked dazed, lips parted and eyes shining with an emotion Remus couldn't read.

Remus looked down at James's chest. He was wearing Auror robes, the badge proudly on display, and that was what made Remus's calm crack for good. His eyes filled with tears and he gasped for breath, stepping back from James, who didn't immediately lower his hands but let them hover uncertainly. Remus lifted a shaky hand to his face, trying to wipe away the tears that were spilling over. James let out a broken sound.

"Remus."

Remus shook his head and stepped back. He looked up at James who seemed to loom over him—big and alpha and an Auror. James might have said he didn't condone the way the Aurors treated werewolves, but the fact that he had remained an Auror after learning about it meant silent acceptance of the poor treatment. He could tell Remus whatever he wanted, but that meant nothing when his actions were in conflict with his words.

James's expression crumbled when he saw Remus's face. He stepped forward and tried to take hold of Remus, but Remus batted his hands away and stepped back.

"I can't," he gasped. "I can't be with an Auror."

James seemed confused, then looked down at himself before looking up at Remus, his expression turning determined.

"Then I will no longer be an Auror," he said.

With swift movements, he took off his Auror robes and tossed them aside. They fell into a heap on the floor, the badge thumping against the carpet. Remus stared at it.

"I will go resign first thing in the morning," James said. "Now, what can I do to help?"

Remus sobbed and said nothing.

"I can leave if that will help you the most right now," James said.

Remus didn't know what he wanted, but he found himself shaking his head.

"Do you want a hug?" James asked.

Remus still didn't know what he wanted, but nodded anyway. James approached him slowly, then gently pulled him into an embrace. His arms were steady and his body warm, and Remus pressed his face against his shoulder.

"There you go," James murmured, stroking Remus's back. "Let it all out. It's understandable to be upset."

Remus clung to James's shirt and tried to stop crying. James continued stroking his back, muttering soothingly, and they stood there until Remus started to calm down, at which point

James guided him to sit down on the bed, never letting go. They sat together until Remus's gasps turned into normal breaths and he started to feel self-conscious over crying.

"I'll get you some water," James said, gave Remus's back a little pat, and got up. "Do you have tissues somewhere?"

Remus nodded and leaned over to open his nightstand drawer, pulling out a pack of tissues. James seemed pleased by this, and headed to the kitchenette, opening cupboards until he found the glasses, while Remus blew his nose.

"There you go," James said as he handed the glass to Remus.

Remus gulped down the water, then handed the glass back to James, who took it into the sink while Remus wiped his eyes with his sleeves.

"Are you feeling a bit better?" James asked as he sat down next to Remus again.

Remus nodded. He couldn't look at James, his face steadily heating as he thought about how he had broken down. James was very kind not to point out how childish it was.

"Do you want to cuddle?" James asked, much to Remus's surprise.

Remus turned to look at him. James gave him an encouraging smile. Remus nodded.

"All right," James said. "Let's lie down, shall we?"

He lay down on the bed and opened his arms for Remus. Remus crawled up to him and settled next to him. James pulled him closer.

"Let me hold you," he said, and pressed a kiss into Remus's hair.

Remus curled closer and closed his eyes. Maybe he could let James hold him, if just for a little while.

Chapter End Notes

I'm absolutely convinced that last week, I was thinking about something I was supposed to put in the end notes, but I have happily forgotten. Let's hope it wasn't anything massively important.

Anyway, I remember I first came up with the idea for this chapter when I was walking my dog back in July, it was after 10pm and the sun was setting and the treetops looked really cool because they were coloured golden, and there were hardly any cars driving by even though we were walking by the big road. I kind of wanted to write this from Sirius's pov, it would have been interesting, and I spent a part of my walk debating whether I should do it.

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Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was only as James was stepping out of the Ministry Floo the next morning that it suddenly occurred to him that he had been an idiot and given a legal statement without a lawyer. How on earth had he allowed himself to do that, especially when he had been in the process of telling Remus off for not having had a lawyer present?

And how had Sirius allowed him to do it?

Instead of heading straight to Scrimgeour's office, James went looking for Sirius and found him already sitting in his cubicle, leaning back in his chair, his hair a curtain covering the backrest.

"I need to speak to you," James said before he had even reached him.

Sirius looked up in surprise, then took in the look on James's face and the bundle of Auror robes James was carrying in his arms. He nodded and stood up.

"Let's go to one of the conference rooms," he said and led the way.

As soon as the door closed behind them, James threw the bundle of robes onto the nearest table.

"I need you to withhold yesterday's paperwork," he said. "How could you let me give a statement without a lawyer there?"

"I can't withhold the paperwork because I have already filed it and it has been approved by Scrimgeour."

"What? How could you do that?"

James took a desperate step towards Sirius, hoping against hope that Sirius was going to burst into laughter any second and tell him it was a joke.

"It was such a routine interrogation," Sirius said lazily and sat down on the table. "A werewolf in the wrong place at the wrong time, brought in because he told the Aurors at the scene that he's a werewolf. I found no evidence of criminal activity and let him go."

James opened his mouth, then closed it, trying to process Sirius's words with his stressed-out morning brain. Sirius raised his wand and put an Imperturbable Charm on the door. He then turned back to James.

"Do you think I would have let you write the statement without a lawyer present if I hadn't already known that statement would never be seen by anyone?"

“But,” James said, stopping to think. “But why did you ask me to write it, then?”

“For the Registry. They needed your statement as evidence that Remus is bonded. They don’t comb through them with lawyers to find loopholes, and they don’t keep them after the paperwork is finished.”

“Oh.”

James blinked and tried to digest the new information as quickly as he possibly could.

“Well,” Sirius said and pointed towards James’s pile of robes. “What’s up with that?”

“I’m resigning.”

“Really? That’s so unfair!”

James frowned. “Why is it unfair?”

“I’ve wanted to resign for years, but then I’ve stayed because—because you wanted to be an Auror.”

James opened his mouth, then took a moment before saying, “We’ll get back to that later. I’m resigning because Remus can’t be with an Auror, and that does not surprise me in the least after what he told me about yesterday.”

“What did he tell you about yesterday?”

“Well, it wasn’t specifically about yesterday. He didn’t actually say much, but I got the gist of it, how he’s assumed to be violent and made to wait for hours... and then Barker wouldn’t give him his wand back... it’s—it’s appalling. I’m going to let Scrimgeour know exactly what I think—”

“You can’t do that.”

James paused with his mouth still open and stared at Sirius in disbelief.

“You can’t do that,” Sirius said. “You can’t make a huge scene about the treatment of werewolves, and you can’t make it widely known that your mate is the werewolf who was brought in yesterday and whom I interrogated.”

“Why?”

“Because you will ruin Remus’s life.”

James saw red. He straightened up to his full height and stepped closer to Sirius.

“Be reasonable now,” Sirius said before James could say anything. “Listen. If people find out that you’re mated to the werewolf your best friend interrogated, how do you think my report is going to look? How many people are going to believe I wasn’t biased? How many of them are going to go digging for the truth?”

James bit his lips together.

“There’s nothing you can do to change things,” Sirius said. “You need to accept that this is not your battle to fight.”

James glared at Sirius, even though he had to admit, albeit reluctantly, that Sirius was right.

“James, you’ll have to understand that Remus is a grown man and has the right to make his own choices regarding his life. You might not like it, but he has lived his life as a werewolf long enough to know when to fight and when to stay quiet, and you can’t change that. You can’t miraculously make the world a more hospitable place for him.”

James said nothing.

“What you can do is to be there for him. You can suggest things, but you will have to believe him when he tells you no, and you can’t take it personally when he does the opposite of what you wanted him to do. You’ll have to learn to support those choices, or he will never trust you to have his back. He’s not your kid. He’s your mate. You will have to give him his independence.”

“I’m not trying to decide for him.”

“What were you doing yesterday, then? Insisting after he told you no? I know you want to help, but sometimes there’s nothing you can do. And you need to accept that.”

James’s shoulders slowly slumped. He didn’t want Sirius to be right, but there was nothing he could come up with to argue.

“How do you know all that?” he muttered to the tips of his shoes.

“Which one of us regularly works with werewolves?” Sirius raised his brows, and when James said nothing, he nodded. “I can tell Remus knows exactly how he needs to act around law enforcement so as not to get in trouble. However, he clearly isn’t used to people helping him, so maybe he’s reluctant to accept help because it was never an option.”

James frowned.

“Although,” Sirius then said, “it wouldn’t surprise me if he had a genuine reason to decline the help of a lawyer, since werewolves never seem to want to talk to one. You’re going to have to ask him.”

“Do you think he would tell me?”

“I don’t know. I’ve met him once. You’re his mate.”

James sighed.

“I actually wanted to ask you about yesterday,” he said and raised his head. “Did Remus smell fearful at any point? He smelled... blank when I arrived.”

“Not fearful, no. I think there was a hint of nervousness once he realised that he was going to have a criminal record, but it’s hard to say since I don’t know him very well.”

“Hmm.”

James wondered how Remus had managed to keep his fear at bay. He supposed the situation was different, as Remus had presumably not been in bed with one of the Aurors who picked him up in the morning, but achieving such a scentless state required a lot of willpower.

“Something that I did notice,” Sirius said, “was that after we were done with the statement, he... well, I guess he went through some breathing exercises that seemed to... he seemed far more mellow by the time you showed up.”

“Oh, so he knows how to put himself in that state.”

“That’s impressive. But also sad to think that he’s had to learn to do that.”

James nodded. There was a niggling thought at the back of his brain trying to make itself known, but he didn’t know how to reach it. It had something to do with Remus and his fear and his ability to mask it so well.

He then thought about the previous day, how Remus had broken down and his scent had surged forward again, like a tidal wave forcefully sweeping through a barrier. And James had smelled his fear.

When James had made the decision to mate with a werewolf, he had expected some things to be different; maybe werewolf instincts were slightly different from human instincts, or maybe Remus would be slightly more possessive than alphas usually were, or maybe the bond would feel different. What he had not known to expect were the social issues. They were Remus’s issues, but they would also affect James because even if no one ever said a bad word about his mate being a werewolf, he would have to watch the world treat Remus poorly.

He would have to watch, and he could do nothing to change things. He would have to see Remus hurt, and he could do nothing but stand by his side.

James had never thought about what life was like for werewolves. He hadn’t thought about how difficult it would be for them to navigate the magical world, and he wondered if that was why Remus had chosen a Muggle job, even though there were magical libraries. And Remus had gone to Muggle school.

Had Remus even had time to study magic? Did he have the required qualifications for a magical job? James had never seen him use his wand, although he *had* heard him Disapparate.

And Remus hadn’t known whether Bristol had a magical neighbourhood, but was that because he couldn’t afford to live there or because he didn’t want to? Was he purposefully keeping a distance to the magical world? Would it be hard for him to find a magical landlord? What did the law say about renting to werewolves?

There were so many layers to Remus that James had not reached yet, about whose existence he didn't even know. They had only been bonded for three weeks, and on top of that, they had spent most of those three weeks apart. They hadn't had a chance to get to know each other more than on the surface level.

And, of course, Remus was also shy and not very forthcoming about things. In some ways, he was a closed book, and it was very fitting that he had learned to mask his scent when he wanted to do so.

James suddenly realised that Remus had allowed him to smell his true feelings.

It was a privilege, and James was going to forever cherish the knowledge that Remus had trusted him enough to show him when he was scared.

"Don't do anything rash," Sirius said.

"I'm going to resign in any case. I can't expect Remus to be fine with me being an Auror after everything. And after he told me he can't be with an Auror."

"Oh, he said that? I thought you had just decided it was better."

"No, he said that he can't be with an Auror. And I want to be with him, so I can no longer be an Auror. He matters to me more than one crummy job."

"What are you going to tell Scrimgeour?"

James sighed.

"I'll tell him I'm having a midlife crisis or something," he said and pushed his hand through his hair. "It doesn't matter, really. But I won't say anything stupid."

Sirius nodded gravely.

"I'll talk to you later," James said. "I'll... Can you take Harry after school? I want to go check on Remus and I don't know how long that will take."

"Of course."

With a sigh, James picked up his Auror robes, while Sirius cancelled the Imperturbable Charm.

"See you later," Sirius said, and James waved at him on his way out.

James headed directly to Scrimgeour's office, wondering how on earth he was going to distract himself from worrying over Remus all day.

James had not remembered to ask Remus what time he would be leaving work, but he thought it was reasonable to assume he would get off at five, as he had so far. But the wait was excruciating.

James had nothing to do, so he ended up deep cleaning the flat, then spent time with Harry after school, and when it was finally five, he sent Harry on his way to Sirius's before making his way to Bristol. He tried to calculate how long it would take Remus to get home from work based on how quickly he had shown up at James's, but he had never looked at the time that closely. He would simply hope that Remus either was already home or very close to home by the time he got there.

James stopped to breathe at Remus's door before ringing the doorbell. The door opened almost immediately, and Remus looked at him in surprise.

"Hello," James said and smiled.

"Hello." Remus hesitated for a moment before saying, "Come in."

Remus stepped back to allow James in, and James noticed he was only wearing one shoe. He must have got home right before James showed up.

"How was work?" James asked as he took off his jacket.

"It was okay. The usual." Remus kicked off the remaining shoe. "What about you?"

"Oh, I cleaned up and then spent some quality time with Harry."

Remus frowned.

"What about work?" he asked.

James paused. Was the question Remus's way of asking if he had really quit? Had he not believed James would do it? Had he imagined that James had only said so to placate him?

"I quit," James said.

Remus was quiet for a long time before he asked, "Why?"

"Why? Because—because you said you can't be with an Auror."

"You quit because I said that? Because of me?"

"Yes."

Whatever James had expected Remus's reaction to be, it wasn't the anger overtaking Remus's scent.

"Why would you do that?" Remus asked, his voice just as angry as his scent.

"Because you deserve a partner who—"

"No! Why would you ruin your life for me? What about your kid? How will you support a child with no job?"

James opened his mouth to tell Remus he would never need to work in his life and would still leave Harry a sizeable inheritance, but Remus wasn't done.

"You can't ruin your life because of someone like me!"

"Why?"

Remus opened and closed his mouth a few times, expression completely stunned, before he said, "I'm not worth it."

"Why?"

Remus straightened up, his eyes burning, and when he spoke, his voice was a growl.

"I'm a werewolf. I can barely afford anything besides the healing potions I take each month. I have nothing to offer you in any regard."

James could only stare. The last time he had seen Remus so completely overtaken by emotion had been when he had first found out that James was an Auror.

"I can't even offer you experience," Remus continued, voice getting louder. "You were not only my first time bonding with someone, you were my first time having sex. You were my first kiss. You were my first time holding hands. You were the first person to have ever expressed interest in me, and I know nothing about relationships or anything to do with them. I have no social skills to speak of, and you're going to ruin your life for me? For nothing?"

James was too stunned to say anything.

"I've been a werewolf since before I had turned five. I don't even know how to be human. And you think I'm worth anything?"

James opened his mouth but didn't know what to say. Remus had never told him that many things about himself, and trying to take it all in at once was taking him a while.

"You should leave," Remus said.

James thought for a moment, then asked, "Do you want to break our bond?"

"You should want to break it."

The tone of Remus's voice told James that it was not the right time to even try having a sensible conversation with him. His scent was so agitated that it was covering his base scent completely.

"Okay, I'll leave," James finally said. "But I'll come back tomorrow to—"

"No! No, don't come tomorrow. You can't come tomorrow."

James was having a hard time interpreting the different layers of Remus's scent, but his tone of voice had turned desperate.

“All right,” James said. “Not tomorrow. But on Saturday, I’m going to come back.”

“I won’t let you in,” Remus mumbled.

James didn’t think he meant it.

“I’ll see you on Saturday, then,” James said and put his jacket on.

Remus said nothing. He was watching James with a stoic expression.

“See you,” James said, and left.

He stood hesitantly in the corridor before making his way out. There was a chill in the air, and he wished he had worn a scarf. He briskly made his way to the Hopping Hippogriff and took the Floo home, where he stopped again. He stood still in front of the fireplace for so long that he was starting to sweat before he realised he should take off his jacket. He went to hang it up, took off his shoes, and went back to the sitting room, where he slumped onto the sofa.

He didn’t even know how and where to start unpacking what Remus had told him, so he started with the emotions.

They hadn’t spent a lot of time together since their mating, so there was a chance that James was wrong, but he was relatively certain that Remus’s scent had been angry. It was supported by Remus’s stance, how he had fully shown his alpha side to James—not to mention what he had said.

None of what had happened sat right with James. Losing his temper was uncharacteristic of the Remus he had got to know over the weeks, as was the amount of highly personal information Remus had given out. And why had he been so vehemently against James visiting him tomorrow? Did he think he needed more time to calm down and come to terms with... with James quitting his job because of him?

James’s heart ached as he thought about the things Remus had told him. He had been bitten when he had been four years old? He had been a werewolf for twenty-five years? It was no wonder he had learned to keep calm while being discriminated against. Had he been able to have at least a relatively normal childhood, or had his life been shadowed by the lycanthropy ever since the bite? It suddenly made sense that he hadn’t gone to Hogwarts.

Twenty-five years... Remus had probably never felt free to be himself anywhere in the wizarding world. Was his current personality completely shaped by the fear of violent reactions, or had he been a timid child to begin with?

Remus had been a werewolf for twenty-five years, and James could not even begin to imagine what his life had been like.

Lonely, it seemed.

Remus was such a nice person there was no doubt in James’s mind that there had been people who would have wanted to be with him. Maybe he was making some leaps of logic, but it

wouldn't surprise him if Remus had been seeking solitude and keeping himself unavailable to anyone who might have wanted to get close to him—even if it had been unconscious.

It broke James's heart to think how lonely Remus must have been growing up.

Was he still lonely? He had never mentioned any friends, but then, James didn't know him very well yet, so maybe it had just never come up.

James had forgotten just how little he knew about Remus and how little Remus knew about him. They hadn't had a chance to date properly, and they had only barely got over the uncertainty of whether they would keep their bond; there had been no time for them to sit down and talk.

James would have to take Remus out. He would have to make an effort to get to know him better, and, in return, allow Remus to get to know him as well.

What if Remus didn't like him once he knew him better?

What if James didn't like Remus once he knew him better?

James had gone into the mating with the idea that it would still be just like normal dating except they were already mated, but somehow, he hadn't considered that their getting to know each other might end with one of them not being interested in continuing the relationship. Now that he had thought about it, he could no longer push the gnawing worry out of his mind.

He got up, strode over to the Floo, and travelled to Sirius's, finding Sirius standing on the sofa, fiddling with the clock on the wall. He turned to look at James in obvious surprise.

"Hi," he said. "I wasn't expecting you back this soon."

James nodded. "Where's Harry?"

"He's doing his homework in the study. He wanted privacy."

Sirius turned back to the clock, poked at it with his wand, then frowned.

"You're not wearing shoes," he said at the clock.

James looked down at his feet, finding his white socks dirty with soot. He took out his wand and cleaned them up, and when he looked up again, Sirius had turned around and was sitting down on the sofa.

"So," Sirius said, patting the sofa next to him. "How come you're back so soon?"

James sighed and sat down. He didn't know what to tell Sirius. It seemed impolite to discuss Remus's sex life—or lack thereof—with Sirius, especially because James hoped that one day Sirius and Remus could be friends, so he should probably keep that to himself, even if it was something he felt the need to talk about.

He had been Remus's first everything? Why had Remus not told him?

Well, he could guess why.

But that didn't stop him from wishing he had known. What if he had done something that had made Remus uncomfortable? He had dragged Remus into bed with him two days after first meeting him, and he hadn't even taken the time to make it anything special, had just jerked them off together. Remus deserved better than that. They hadn't even taken their clothes off!

And Remus had cried afterwards. James had assumed it had been caused by the different hormones that were released during mating, but what if Remus had been upset by something that had happened? James would not put it past him not to let him know if he was upset about something James did.

Had Remus even been ready to have sex? He had said he'd wanted to, but what if he had only said so because he thought he had to? What if—

“Jim?”

James turned to look at Sirius, who was watching him with a frown.

“What happened?” Sirius asked.

“Well,” James said slowly and sighed. “Remus... was upset that I quit.”

“What? Why?”

“He thinks I'm throwing my life away for him and he's not worth it. He was too worked up to listen, so I didn't get a chance to tell him I don't actually need a job. And he... told me some really personal things that I had no idea about and I'm a bit... I'm not sure how to feel.”

“Right... okay.” Sirius shifted. “What type of personal things?”

“His... relationship history and...”

James couldn't help imagining Harry at the age of four, how small and vulnerable he had been. Remus had been like that, too, when he had been that age. The idea of a werewolf having bitten Harry at such a young age—or at any age, for that matter—made James feel sick, and he wondered how Remus's parents had reacted. How had Remus reacted? He had been so young he had probably not even fully understood what happened to him. Did he still remember it?

“He's been a werewolf since he was four,” James said, voice barely audible.

“Four?” Sirius whispered.

James nodded and looked towards the corridor that led to the study and the bedrooms. He suddenly had the urge to check on Harry.

“Can you even imagine what that's like?” James asked.

Sirius sighed and rubbed his face with his hand.

“Did he tell you how it happened?” he asked.

James shook his head. “I’m not sure he meant to reveal as much as he did. He was... agitated. He was angry. To be honest, I’m a bit surprised he had that in him. He’s always so... well, calm, I guess, even when he’s nervous. It was so sexy. And I feel bad for thinking that because he was telling me all these things that are just so... sad, and he’s genuinely worried about Harry and my future, and half of my brain is just focused on how sexy he is when he’s assertive.”

Sirius chuckled.

“He’s much more inexperienced than I imagined,” James said, “when it comes to relationships. I’m a bit worried that I might have been making things uncomfortable, and he just hasn’t had the courage to tell me.”

“Would he have told you now? If he was already telling you personal things, wouldn’t he have also said if he was unhappy with how things have progressed with you?”

“I don’t know. I just feel so guilty.”

“You don’t need to feel guilty. It’s not your fault he hasn’t told you these things before.”

“Hmm, maybe.”

If Remus were unhappy, wouldn’t he have told James he wanted to break their bond when James had asked him? James had asked him several times, and he had always said he didn’t want to break it. Well, except when he had said he didn’t know. He had honestly told James when he didn’t know, so didn’t that mean that if he had wanted to break it, he would have told James that?

“Will you see him tomorrow?” Sirius asked.

James shook his head. “He forbade me from going tomorrow, so I’ll go on Saturday.”

“Harry can stay here. Or I could take him out to do something fun and secret.”

“Something secret?” James asked, a smile spreading over his lips.

“Yup. We haven’t done any secret godfather-godson activities in a while.”

“Feel free to partake in secret godfather-godson activities if you want to. I hope you know Harry tells me everything afterwards?”

“He does? That traitor!”

James laughed at the expression of mock indignation on Sirius’s face, then remembered their conversation from that morning.

“Hey,” he said, “do you really not want to be an Auror any longer?”

Sirius bit his lip and looked away, his scent souring like it hadn’t in years. It had also been years since he had last acted so uncertain in front of James, and James didn’t like that he felt he had something to be ashamed of now.

“I don’t like it,” Sirius said quietly. “I don’t like that I’m not allowed to make my own decisions unless I’m the only Auror on scene. And I don’t like how some of them talk about other people. And I don’t like how situations with Muggles are handled. And... you know what? Yesterday, Walker called Remus an it.”

“He did, did he?”

James wanted to immediately get up and find Walker and let him know exactly what James thought about him, but one glance at Sirius’s slumped shoulders reminded him of what was more important.

“How long have you felt this way?” he asked.

Sirius took a long time before he said, “Since we started training.”

James opened his mouth, then closed it. He opened it again, but didn’t know what to say, so he closed it. Sirius was still not looking at him.

“Since training?” James finally managed. “You went through three years of training and have worked as an Auror for two? And all this time you’ve hated it?”

Sirius shrugged.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” James asked.

“You wanted to do it.”

James found himself speechless.

“And I didn’t know what else I would do,” Sirius said, “so.”

“Are you—are you aware that we don’t have to work in the same place? That we don’t have to do all the same things?”

Sirius shrugged.

“Sirius. I find it concerning that you haven’t been able to tell me that you hate your job and only took it because it was a job I wanted.”

Sirius shrugged again.

“All right,” James said. “Tomorrow, you will go in and you will quit. If you don’t do it, I will, because you’re not going to waste a day longer doing something you hate.”

Sirius finally turned to look at James.

“Do you have any ideas about what you might want to do instead?” James asked.

Sirius shook his head.

“I’ll help you think,” James said. He hesitated for a moment, then asked, “Why did you think you had to have the same job as me?”

Sirius sounded reluctant when he said, “You might find better friends.”

James blinked. He waited, but Sirius said nothing else.

“No one is ever going to be a better friend than you,” James said. “Even if I make new friends, no one will ever replace you. Think about everything we’ve been through together. If that couldn’t drive us apart, then nothing will.”

Sirius looked at him with his big, sad eyes.

“Come here,” James said and pulled Sirius into a one-armed hug. “You will always be my best friend, no matter what. Okay?”

“Okay,” Sirius mumbled, but he smelled less gloomy.

James patted him on the back.

“Thank you,” Sirius said.

“You’re welcome.”

They sat quietly for a moment.

“So,” James then said. “What plans do you have for Saturday with Harry?”

“Oh, I can’t tell you that. They’re secret plans.”

Sirius was grinning again, and James felt marginally better.

That night, he couldn’t sleep because he was thinking about Sirius as well as Remus.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Hello! I have changed my name. (And if you're like me and have a hard time remembering names, I used to be mean_whale.)

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Remus's throat was sore. He was panting, lying in a pool of his own blood, and because he hadn't lost consciousness during the transformation, he had to experience the worst of the pain rather than wake up after he was slightly better.

His mouth tasted like his own flesh, and he couldn't move his left arm, which lay uselessly on the cold floor. He was starting to shiver, which made him hurt more, his body's involuntary movements shifting the broken parts of him.

He didn't know how long he had lain there before the door to the shed creaked open and Dad stepped in. Without a word, he crouched down next to Remus, healing the wounds that hadn't been caused by the wolf's teeth. He took a moment to figure out what was going on with Remus's arm, healed the forearm with a simple *Episkey*, and used the complicated healing spell Remus knew was to heal torn tendons on Remus's shoulder. Dad ran a diagnostic spell that found nothing else hugely out of place in Remus's body, then got up. He had brought a blanket with him and laid it over Remus before leaving without saying a thing. There was a warming charm on the blanket, and Remus stopped shivering.

Remus took a while longer to lie still before he crawled up and made his way to the house, wrapped in the ratty blanket that had an old bloodstain on it, feet tucked into worn-out wellies that were too big for him. Dad was nowhere to be seen. There was a fresh glass of water next to the phials of potions on the kitchen table.

Remus took the potions, then drank the water. He got dressed, took another potion, and Apparated into his flat. He never stopped being amazed that the Ministry had permitted him to Apparate into a Muggle neighbourhood after full moons, but maybe they didn't want him staggering around the streets looking haggard and torn. Or maybe they hoped he would splinch himself badly enough to bleed out and die.

It was not even eight o'clock yet. Remus undressed and went into the loo, looking in the mirror. He looked horrible, but that was normal. He had a couple of open wounds on his arms, and he took out the Essence of Dittany to heal them. The skin was left looking angry and red, but intact. He was running out of Dittany and didn't know when—if ever—he could afford it again.

After he had washed himself, Remus pulled on his pyjamas, took two more potions, and dropped into bed. He pulled the blanket over himself and immediately fell into a dreamless sleep.

He was awoken by his doorbell.

It left a ringing in his ears, and Remus thought about staying in bed and not answering the door. He knew it was James, and he had told James that he wouldn't let him in, although he hadn't really meant it. But was James worth getting up from bed?

Remus staggered up and to the door. He opened it and was greeted by James's bright smile that dropped the moment he saw the state Remus was in.

"Hello," he said uncertainly.

Remus didn't like it when James was uncertain. It made everything else seem uncertain, too.

Remus grunted and stepped aside to let James in. James was hesitant in his movements, and Remus impatiently closed the door the moment James was through it.

"Are you okay?" James asked.

Remus grunted again, and before James had even started taking his jacket off, he had already returned to bed, burrowed under the covers, and fallen asleep.

In his dreams, Remus was trapped in a small room whose walls were closing in on him on each side, pressing against him as he tried to contort his body to fit between them. He woke up when they started crushing his bones.

His flat was filled with light, which meant that he hadn't slept through the day. He watched the dust particles dance in the beam of sunlight, slowly blinking his eyes, and when he turned his head, he found James sitting on his sofa.

"Good morning," James said, lowering the book he had been reading. "Do you need anything?"

Remus stared at him for a moment before shaking his head.

What was James doing there and how had he got in?

"I fixed your sofa," James said. "I hope you don't mind. I just... like fixing things."

Remus continued staring, unable to form thoughts, let alone words.

"It was a bit tricky," James said. "I'm not familiar with fixing sofas, so I don't know what they have going on inside, and there was quite some magical residue on it, so I wasn't sure if what happened to it was a magical accident or just... normal wear and tear."

James was starting to look uncomfortable. He placed the book on the chest of drawers.

“How did you get in?” Remus finally croaked.

His throat still hurt.

James looked baffled.

“You let me in,” he said. “Do you not remember?”

Remus frowned. He tried to think back to earlier that day, but all he could remember was the previous day and how Dad had looked darkly at the mating mark on his neck. Then he remembered the pain of the transformation, the pain of thinking about how his own father thought he wasn’t worth loving, and then the pain of transforming into a human again. He closed his eyes and thought, vaguely remembered staggering inside and taking potions, but after that, things were blurry.

“Did I?” he finally asked, opening his eyes.

James nodded.

Remus didn’t know what he was supposed to say, so he said, “Oh.”

“Are you sure you don’t need anything? You look a bit... rough.”

Remus blinked. He pushed himself up. His joints were aching, but it wasn’t bad. The newly healed skin on his arms felt tight, but that wasn’t bad either. Sitting up, he noticed a muscle pain in his left leg, but that would have to be far worse for him to consider it bad.

What was bad, however, was James watching him like a hawk. He was taking in each little twitch of Remus’s body, and it was dawning on Remus that he was in his pyjamas, which meant that his arms were in full display, and James could see all the scars—the old and the new.

Remus looked at his arms; the new scars were still angry and red, although otherwise healed. He wondered if he should pull his blanket up, but did it really matter? James had already seen.

Let him look. Let him look and understand what Remus was, what it physically meant to be a werewolf.

James was taking in the sight, his expression remaining passive but his scent thickening. Remus didn’t know what it meant, but it couldn’t be good.

“Are you hurt?” James asked, then shook his head. “No, I meant to ask if you’re in pain right now?”

“Not really.”

Remus remembered his arm had hurt that morning. It had probably been fractured. He moved it gingerly, but it felt normal.

“What happened?” James asked.

He sounded upset, and Remus turned to look at him with a frown. He also looked upset.

“What?” Remus asked.

“What happened to you?”

James turned to look Remus in the eye, and his eyes were sorrowful. Remus didn’t understand why he wasn’t disgusted.

Maybe it was pity?

But Remus was familiar with pity. He knew what it felt like to be the object of a pitying gaze, and seeing James’s eyes only made him sad.

Had anyone ever been truly compassionate towards him before? Remus couldn’t remember.

What he did remember were his mother’s cries of anguish that time turned into dispassionate sighs that were extinguished by the eventual apathy. He remembered the silence in the house following the attack, how all the sounds seemed to have vanished, taken away by the werewolf who took away Remus’s life. Who also took away his mother’s life. He remembered walking on his tippy toes so as not to disturb her, walking past his parents’ bedroom when the door had been cracked open and seeing her lie in bed, her back to the door.

He couldn’t remember what she had smelled like back when he had still been a human, and for some reason, it upset him greatly.

He focused on James’s scent. It was as thick as porridge, filling the room, but Remus didn’t understand it. He was sure he used to understand scents because he could remember that as a child, he could understand the different scents of his parents, but throughout the years, that knowledge seemed to have drained from him.

“What do you mean?” Remus asked, because the silence that had fallen had started to upset him, too.

James looked bewildered and took a moment to stare.

“What do I mean?” he finally asked and gave a hysterical laugh. “You’re injured! You look like death warmed up! What do I mean!”

Remus couldn’t even begin to guess why James was so confused by the state Remus was in. Had he not realised how physical the full moon was? Had he never read about werewolf transformations and what they did to the body? Or had he simply never realised that transforming and being confined in a small space meant physical injuries?

“It’s normal,” Remus said. “This is... normal.”

“Normal! How can you say it’s normal?”

There was an odd glint in James's eyes and his scent surged forward as he leaned more towards the bed.

"Because it is," Remus said. "It was a good full moon, actually. I wasn't very badly hurt."

"It— Good—" James faltered. He swallowed. Then, with a small voice, he asked, "Full moon?"

Remus nodded. James's face did something complicated, before understanding started spreading through his expression.

"It was the full moon last night?" James asked, trying to sound nonchalant but failing spectacularly.

"Yes."

James nodded, his eyes not leaving Remus.

"Right," he said. "And... it was a good one?"

"Well, as good as they can be, I guess. I didn't break any bones."

"Uh-huh." James nodded, then nodded again. "And do you often break bones during the full moon?"

"It depends on the month. But I guess I have broken bones more often than not."

"Right, yes." James nodded. He swallowed. "But not this time?"

"No. I just had a small fracture. It was quick to heal."

James bit his lips together and nodded. He was still looking at Remus, but Remus wasn't sure he could actually see anything.

"And"—James cleared his throat—"are there... any other injuries?"

"Nothing bad."

"And... what would you consider bad?"

Remus shrugged. He genuinely did not know how to answer. James nodded.

"And what is nothing bad, exactly?" he asked after a moment's hesitation.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course." James cleared his throat and focused his eyes on Remus's face again. "Of course. I wouldn't ask otherwise."

Remus hesitated. He didn't know if he should tell James honestly or let him believe nothing truly bad ever happened during Remus's transformations.

“Please,” James said. “If... if it doesn’t make you too uncomfortable.”

It probably made Remus too uncomfortable, but maybe he should share, anyway. Hadn’t James given up his job because of Remus? He was willing to ruin his life, so wasn’t it only fair that he knew exactly what it meant to be bonded to a werewolf?

“I—well, I had some scrapes from something in the shed. I had the fracture. A torn ligament. A sore throat. Several bite wounds.”

Remus gestured at his arms where the bites were still obvious.

“And that’s... nothing bad?” James asked, sounding almost desperate.

“It’s normal.”

James took a moment to think, then nodded. He sighed and turned to look at the wall instead, leaning back on the sofa, and it was only then that Remus realised he had said he had fixed the sofa while he had waited for Remus to wake up.

Had he wondered why Remus hadn’t fixed it himself? He must have, and he was going to ask about it at some point, probably when Remus least expected it.

As if James needed any more reasons to pity Remus.

“If it’s okay for me to ask,” James then said, turning back to Remus, “when you say bite wounds, you mean...”

“The wolf bites itself in captivity.”

James’s expression was definitely sorrowful. If Remus wanted to, he could almost imagine a sheen of tears in his eyes, but he didn’t particularly want to.

Maybe he was wrong, and it was pity.

“Well,” James then said and took a deep breath, releasing it as a sigh. “Are you all healed? Do you need help with something? Anything?”

Remus shook his head. “I’m fine. I just need another potion for the joint pain.”

“Joint pain?”

“It’s not really a pain. It’s an ache.”

“An ache is a type of pain.” James looked at Remus for a moment, then stood up. “Where do you keep the potions? I’ll get it for you.”

Remus opened his mouth to protest, but then closed it. James’s expression told him he wouldn’t take no for an answer, and Remus might as well save his strength for something more important, so he pointed towards the kitchenette.

“They’re in that cupboard in the corner. Green bottle, no label.”

James nodded and headed to the kitchenette. Remus watched him go, open the cupboard, and rattle the bottles before he found the right one.

It felt wrong to have someone in his flat while Remus was recovering from the full moon. The last time he’d had someone look after him the day after, he had still been a teenager, and Dad had done it because Mum couldn’t. He had continued doing it for a couple of months after Mum had passed, but it had turned into less and less help until it had stopped completely. Remus remembered being sixteen and lying in bed and listening to the silence of the house as he wondered if he was well enough to get up to fetch the potion.

James returned with the correct bottle and set it gently on the nightstand.

“Should I get you a glass?” he asked.

Remus picked up the bottle and looked at the small amount of potion left in it. It wasn’t the most expensive of the healing potions, but he still thought he should make it last at least two full moons more, so he shook his head.

“A spoon, please,” he said.

James paused, but then went over to the kitchenette and found Remus a spoon. He remained by the bed as Remus poured some of the potion into the spoon and took it, cringing at the sour taste that he never grew accustomed to.

“Are you going to need more later?” James asked as Remus set the bottle and spoon back onto the nightstand.

“No.”

“I’ll take it back then, shall I?”

James took the bottle and took it back. Remus wasn’t sure what to do. He wanted to go back to sleep, so he would sleep past the most annoying of the aches, but it felt rude when James had come there to see him.

He still hadn’t decided when James closed the cupboard and turned back to him.

“Do you need anything else?” James asked. “Water?”

“Water would be nice, thank you.”

James got Remus a glass of water, and Remus drank it gratefully. He hadn’t noticed how thirsty he had been before James had asked.

“Why was your throat sore?” James asked.

When Remus turned to look at him, he seemed surprised by his question.

“That would be all the screaming,” Remus said, and placed the empty glass on the nightstand.

“What screaming?”

Remus hesitated, but then said, “The transformation hurts.”

That seemed to be the detail that properly disturbed James. He stood there, staring at Remus with his mouth agape, unable to say anything. His eyes were searching Remus’s face—for what, Remus didn’t know.

“I need to lie down,” Remus said, unable to look James in the eye while he contemplated the ins and outs of being a werewolf.

“Yes, of course,” James said, but his voice sounded absent.

Remus lay down and pulled the blanket over his arms. He felt marginally more comfortable with his scars under covers.

James was still frozen. He stood there for a long time before he seemed to remember himself, shook his head, and went to sit down on the sofa again.

“Thank you for fixing my sofa,” Remus said quietly, still not looking James in the eye.

“You’re welcome.”

The dreaded question *why had you not bothered to do it yourself* never followed.

James still seemed to be in his own head, so Remus let him be. It would take him time to fully digest the fact that being a werewolf was... well, Remus didn’t know what James had thought it would be. He obviously hadn’t realised it hurt, so maybe he wasn’t very knowledgeable about it in the first place. Maybe Hogwarts only taught the books that told one how to recognise and kill a werewolf. Remus had only ever come across one book that discussed lycanthropy from the point of view of the werewolf and not the unfortunate wizard who might come across it.

Remus’s eyelids were getting heavy. He watched James sit and think, his blinks becoming slower and slower until his eyes no longer opened. His mind started to wander, taking him back to the shed that morning, then the evening years earlier when he had still been growing into the man he had become, his body feeling awkward, and his fur had been softer back then, although he wasn’t sure how he knew that; he simply did.

He was the wolf, and he was prowling the shed, howling at the moon that he could hear through the tin roof, he could hear it in his soul, and then he could see it because there was a window by the ceiling, so high up that he had never noticed it before. And it was open, bringing in spring scents, and he jumped, weightlessly soaring through the air and out the window.

He fell towards the ground and jolted awake, opening his eyes to find James watching him.

“Did you have one of those dreams where you fall and your body thinks you’re really falling?” James asked.

Remus nodded.

“You should sleep if you’re tired,” James said.

It still made Remus feel rude to even contemplate sleeping while James was visiting.

“Am I making you uncomfortable?” James asked. “Do you want me to leave?”

Remus wanted to say yes, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. He had never wanted to be alone, that was merely the hard life he had dealt with before leading him to believe it was what he deserved. And maybe it was right, maybe he did deserve his solitude for being a monster, but having someone outright offer to stay...

“I want you to stay,” Remus whispered.

James nodded. “Then I’ll stay.”

Remus nodded. He didn’t know what to do. Should he try to sleep? But what would James do while he slept? He had been reading a book, but Remus was under the impression that reading wasn’t exactly one of James’s passions.

“Would you,” James asked, “would you like to cuddle? Or are you in too much pain?”

It wasn’t a matter of wanting, though, was it? It was a matter of deserving, and Remus didn’t deserve comfort. He hadn’t deserved it since he had become a beast because beasts didn’t get the love humans did. Beasts were terrifying and dangerous, and getting close to him would always be a risk, and even when it was not the full moon, he still carried the beast inside him. It was why Mum had never dared to touch him again, even when he was crying because being a beast was painful.

“I’m not in too much pain,” he finally said.

If he said that, he wasn’t asking. He wasn’t asking, and if James offered, it would be fine because he had chosen to do so in spite of Remus’s monstrosity.

James smiled. He got up from the sofa and slipped into bed, pulling Remus, still wrapped in his blanket, against his warm body. He pressed a soft kiss onto Remus’s forehead, and Remus closed his eyes and swallowed.

He could not remember anyone ever kissing him on the forehead. He was certain it must have happened before, while he was still human, but he could not remember it.

“You just sleep,” James murmured. “You need rest.”

Remus turned his head to hide his face against James’s chest because he didn’t want James to notice he was about to cry. James cooed and stroked his back, making him suspect that he had realised, after all.

“It’s okay,” James whispered. “You’re okay.”

And Remus wanted to believe him. He wanted so badly to be okay, to be just fine and worthy of *something*.

James smelled nice. Having him in bed strengthened the scent on Remus’s pillow, and Remus idly toyed with the thought of asking James to scent the pillow before he left, so that even when he was gone, Remus could feel him there with him, Remus could pretend that he wasn’t cold and alone.

The thought of not being worthy of James made him remember James had quit his job for Remus. Remus didn’t like that. He didn’t like being the cause of such a big change in someone else’s life, especially because quitting one’s job made life uncertain. How long would it take before James found a new job? How would it affect how he could take care of Harry? Would he have time to see Remus while job hunting? Would he, with enough time, grow to resent Remus for having cost him his livelihood?

“I’m sorry,” Remus whispered.

“Why? You have nothing to apologise for. I’m glad I can take care of you.”

“No.” Remus fell silent for a moment. “I’m sorry you lost your job because of me.”

“Oh no, no. I didn’t lose it. I quit because I wanted to. It was my own selfish decision. Do *not* blame yourself. Also, you didn’t let me explain last time, so you don’t know, but I don’t need a job to survive financially. I have money. I have enough money. You don’t need to worry about me.”

Remus didn’t know what to say. So, James had money and wouldn’t starve or lose his home while he was unemployed, but that implied that he had far more money than Remus had thought. Even Remus’s wildest guesses had not been enough, as he had imagined that maybe James had enough to comfortably look for a job for a few months, possibly even up to a year, without having to rush for the first opportunity.

But that he didn’t need a job at all?

Remus had known that James had money, but that he was rich?

Remus couldn’t wrap his head around it.

And James was going to waste his life on someone like Remus? Compared to him, Remus was a patch of dirt on the sole of someone’s shoe, and James was going to take Remus as his life partner?

“It also ended up being a good thing for Sirius,” James said. “Turns out he didn’t like being an Auror. He had only gone along with what I wanted because he worried I’d find better friends if we didn’t have the same job. It makes me sad that after everything, he still feels that way.”

Remus didn't know what to say. He didn't have people come to him with their worries or looking for comfort. He could easily commiserate with his friends because they usually discussed the difficulties of being werewolves and Remus could relate to that, but having a best friend who worried about losing him? That was a foreign concept.

"Why did you want to be an Auror?" Remus found himself asking.

"Well, to protect people from the Dark Arts, mainly. I think I first thought about becoming an Auror after we learned about Grindelwald."

"And what did you think about the fact that werewolves are considered a part of the Dark Arts?"

"That's rubbish. The Dark Arts are purposeful magic, and being a werewolf isn't... it's not a part of the Dark Arts."

"Werewolves are Dark."

James let out a sharp breath. Remus wasn't sure why he was insisting. He should let it be and hope that James had actually meant it when he had said he didn't agree with how other Aurors treated werewolves. Remus could probably live with it.

"It's not the same," James said. "You didn't purposefully become a Dark wizard. You're just... you."

"Then why am I always brought in for questioning when I happen across an Auror? Why is my ability to use a wand always doubted when they're giving me back my things? Why do they hold me as if I'm about to run away when I have not given them a reason to think I might do that?"

"That's—"

"How have you been able to look the other way when they do that? Or have you done it as well? Have you also been especially rough when conducting a frisk search on a werewolf?"

"A frisk search? They... someone frisked you? We don't do that. The whole place is covered with charms that will indicate if someone is concealing something dangerous."

Remus had sometimes wondered about the need for frisk searches—especially because not all the Aurors had frisked him—but he wasn't sure he had wanted confirmation of their needlessness.

"How did you not know that?" Remus asked. "Isn't that something all of you should know? Or are you suggesting someone came up with it on their own?"

James said nothing. There was a shift in his scent, but Remus didn't know what it meant. He was becoming tired again.

"I don't—I don't know what to say," James said after a considerable pause. "I'm..."

Remus wasn't sure he wanted to remain in James's arms. The conversation had only reminded him of why he should have broken their bond the moment he had learned James was an Auror.

"I'll talk to you about this once I've had some time to think," James finally said. "Is that okay?"

Remus nodded. He didn't feel like opening his mouth.

James said nothing else, and they lay there in silence, James still holding Remus, but he was stiff. Remus wanted to roll away, but he didn't, because he also wanted to be held. Even if the only person who would hold him was an Auror.

He sometimes wondered if he could have lived his life differently. Should he not have listened to his parents and tried to make friends with his schoolmates, even if they were Muggles and he would have to have been very careful not to let them know magic existed? Even if they would have then started asking questions about his absences and the scars on his hands? Even if he might have ended up breaking the Statute of Secrecy, had it been worth it to isolate himself on purpose?

But then, if he had broken the Statute of Secrecy and the Ministry found out—which they would have—he would have got in trouble, and he would probably have a criminal record because even though he would have been a child, he would still have been a werewolf. And werewolves could never be just children. They were always werewolves.

Remus was never just Remus; he was always a werewolf. He could never be anything else, and he would continue to bring down the people around him. Dad had been right to scoff at his mating mark; he shouldn't have let anyone bond with him. He should have tried harder to find a mate on his own—a werewolf mate, who would already understand what life was always going to be like, whose quality of life would not get worse because they were bonded to Remus.

But how could he have ever achieved that? He didn't have the social skills required to make friends, let alone find a lover. He didn't even know how people did that; how did someone meet another person and find a connection with them and had that person want them back? How did an acquaintance or a friend turn romantic? What did it require for someone to want to do more than talk to him?

The fact that James had wanted to talk to him and kiss him and mate with him was nothing short of a miracle, but it wasn't exactly something James did out of his own free will. He had bonded with Remus out of necessity, and had they met under any other circumstances, they might have made friends if they'd had enough chances to talk, but mates? Never.

Because people didn't look at Remus and find him desirable. People didn't look at him and want to touch him. They looked at him, and in the best-case scenario, they saw no one. In the worst case, they saw a repulsive werewolf.

Remus wanted to be fine with being no one, because it was far better than being a werewolf, but being no one meant loneliness, the endless, aching solitude that sometimes swallowed

him and made his heart twinge. It meant mornings of cold floors and cold breakfasts, it meant workdays of hollow smiles and a few words exchanged with his colleagues, it meant coming home to nothing and reading a book to forget it all.

Being no one kept him safe from other people's hatred, but not from his own.

And he did not deserve James's affection because it wasn't sincere. It could never be sincere, because the moment James learned to know Remus better, he would realise that underneath being a werewolf, he was no one.

And James wouldn't want to stay bonded to no one.

Chapter End Notes

So, chapter 12 still needs a lot of work and a lot of thinking, so I'm not sure if I can get it done in two weeks, especially because I have an exam at the end of this month. But I'll try, and if it's not finished in time, I'll just post it whenever it is finished.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus had fallen asleep some time ago. James had been unsure for a while because while Remus's scent had calmed down and lost its gloomy note, it was not the same as it had been the last time Remus had slept in James's arms. Remus smelled unwell. He smelled of injury, and there was a layer of the smell of potions that seemed to have seeped into his skin. Or maybe James was imagining it; Remus had only recently taken a potion and the smell might have lingered.

James swallowed thickly. He was glad Remus was asleep and couldn't smell him because he was certain Remus wouldn't be happy with the aching worry that must have overtaken James's scent, as it was the emotion most present in his heart.

James hadn't really thought about it earlier, but it wasn't only that he didn't know about werewolf mating; he didn't know anything about werewolves other than the obvious—transforming into a wolf during the full moon—and he couldn't believe he had never stopped to think about it.

The full moon was going to become a permanent aspect of his life, wasn't it? Now that he had realised what it meant for Remus, he would never be able to forget, and he would always know when the next full moon would be upon them.

Where did Remus go to transform? Did the Ministry have facilities for that? James would assume so. He wondered if it would be rude to ask Remus about his full-moon accommodations. Did Remus have someone to help him in the mornings, when he was injured and in pain, or did he have to treat himself? It wouldn't surprise James to find out that Remus was stubbornly going through everything on his own, but it would certainly upset him. It upset him to know that his mate had been hurt and he hadn't known; he hadn't been there to help.

Was it possible for a werewolf to get through the injuries a full moon caused with no help? What if they injured both their arms and couldn't hold a wand? What if they were so badly hurt they couldn't move? If Remus was going through it alone, was it possible that one month, he would disappear and never return because he had been too hurt to help himself and had died—alone and cold and scared?

James swallowed and blinked his eyes. He would have to ask because the image of Remus's lifeless body lying on a cold cement floor would otherwise never leave him alone. He wondered how difficult it would be to convince Remus to let him help.

Remus hadn't talked about the lycanthropy much, but James hadn't asked, either. Could it be that Remus didn't talk about it because he thought James didn't want to hear? Remus thought he wasn't worth anything, so it wouldn't surprise James.

Or had he not wanted to talk about it because James had been an Auror until only a couple of days ago?

What Remus had asked him about his career was a slimy thing slithering around his gut. It had been a fair question. It had been so fair, in fact, that James wasn't sure how he had never thought about it himself. And while he wanted to keep positing that as a question, he reluctantly had to admit that he already knew the answer; he had been able to look away because what happened to werewolves had never been a personal issue for him. He hadn't been aware of the extent of the mistreatment—he had certainly never heard of anyone wanting to perform a frisk search on someone—but he had known there was a certain level of hostility that always arose when they discussed werewolves.

James's duties had never really put him in contact with werewolves, and that had probably kept him in the dark and aided him in wilfully closing his eyes and ears when he heard the others discussing werewolves in ways he disagreed with. He had made his views known only to the extent that his colleagues learned not to bring him into those discussions, but not so much that he would have been branded a radical. He had never tried to change their minds because he knew it was impossible, but also because it hadn't concerned him.

It concerned him now, and he wasn't happy to realise that it had required him to get to know a werewolf before it had started bothering him. Before he had met Remus, the discrimination werewolves faced had been an abstract concept to him, and it had been easy to forget about when he wanted to.

Remus could never forget, no matter how much he might want to.

James didn't know what he should tell Remus. He didn't know what he could possibly say. He suddenly remembered Sirius had said he didn't like how Muggles were dealt with. What had he meant by that? As far as James was aware, Muggles were promptly Obliviated to keep them from remembering whatever it was they had witnessed. Had Sirius meant that? And if so, what did he find problematic about it? Wasn't it in everyone's best interest that the wizarding world remained a secret?

Or was that another thing James had simply never thought about? Was it possible that the Aurors didn't play fair with more people other than werewolves? Hadn't he himself used his badge to make the Registry receptionist release Remus? That had been an ethically questionable decision, even if he still thought it had been the right thing to do.

James looked at Remus's sleeping face. He had fallen asleep with his face hidden against James's chest, but he had since shifted and turned his head so that James could see him. He was paler than usual, and the dark bags under his eyes were more pronounced, but otherwise, he looked the same.

The transformation hurt.

In hindsight, it made sense, as during a transformation the body went through massive changes, but James had never realised that. He hadn't given it much thought, if he were honest, but he had vaguely thought that because it was a magical transformation, it would be painless or, at worst, uncomfortable. James wondered how many of the healing potions

Remus took each month were to help with the pain caused by the transformation itself rather than injuries sustained during the night. Remus had said his joints were aching. Were there other pains it caused?

And Remus had said he had trouble affording all the potions he needed. James didn't know how much more specialised potions cost, but as the father of a young child, he knew that basic healing potions weren't expensive. How many potions did Remus need? There had been quite a collection in the cupboard.

James would have to read up on werewolves. He didn't want to ask Remus for detailed explanations because it clearly made him uneasy to discuss, but he needed to know what it was exactly that Remus went through each full moon.

Then he thought about what they had been taught about werewolves in school, and wondered if there were any books that talked about werewolves as more than dangerous beasts. Had anyone cared to write about the pain they went through during the full moon? And what about Remus's odd burst of anger the other day? Had that been related to the approaching full moon?

Maybe Remus would know of books to read. James would ask him that while he asked him other things as well, such as, *Why did you not tell me I was your first?*

James lay awake, staring at the ceiling, stroking Remus's back and, when he was not worrying over Remus, wondering about what Sirius and Harry were doing, until Remus stirred and his scent regained its nervous edge.

"Did you sleep well?" James asked.

Remus grunted, but then nodded. He still had his eyes closed.

"Do you need anything?" James asked.

Remus grunted again, but didn't in any way indicate what the answer was.

Maybe Remus was not a morning person—even if it was late afternoon—and needed some more time to wake up in peace. So, James continued stroking his back as Remus sleepily rubbed his cheek against James's chest. It was very cute, but James assumed it only happened because Remus was still groggy from sleep; he didn't think a properly awake Remus would express such obvious affection.

It took quite a while, but Remus eventually opened his eyes and sat up. Without a word, he climbed out of the bed and headed to the loo. James remained lying down until the door had closed behind Remus.

James sat up.

He wasn't sure what to do. Had Remus eaten? Should James cook for him? But he didn't know if Remus had restrictions on what he could or could not eat after a full moon. Could he even afford proper food? Should James go to the grocery for him?

That would probably make Remus uncomfortable, though. James may not have known him very well yet, but considering how embarrassed Remus had been to show his flat to James and how he hadn't actually asked for any help, had merely let James do it because James offered, he was bound to be embarrassed over his money situation and having someone offer to buy him something as basic as food.

Maybe James should ask anyway—in case Remus didn't have enough money for food.

The door to the loo opened and Remus walked out, looking much more alert than he had all day. He was still wearing his pyjamas, which comprised an old T-shirt and a faded pair of boxers, meaning that James could see how scarred his legs were in addition to his arms. It shouldn't have surprised him because he had already seen Remus's arms, but somehow James's brain had not made that connection. Maybe he hadn't wanted to think about it because it forced him to also think about how much pain Remus must have been in after every full moon.

James assumed that Remus only had scars from when he had bitten himself because there were several ways of getting rid of scars that weren't cursed, but that didn't make it any better. There were a couple that were still angrily red on his arms, and because Remus had said it had been a good full moon, didn't that mean he bit himself several times in one night?

"Is there anything I can do?" James asked.

Remus looked at him for a moment before shaking his head. James wanted to insist, but it might not be the right answer. Instead, he watched as Remus headed to the kitchenette and got a pot out of the cupboard.

"I'm sorry I don't really have any food to offer," Remus said, not turning to look at James. "I usually have some porridge the day after the full moon."

"That's fine." James paused. "If you have ingredients, I could cook? If you... if you can eat normal food?"

Remus had been reaching for the door of a different cupboard and stopped. His arm wavered.

"I enjoy cooking," James said. "I like taking care of people."

Remus lowered his arm. His shoulders looked narrower than usual, and James wondered if it was because of the T-shirt or if he was imagining it.

"I have some stuff in the fridge," Remus said.

He sounded weary, and as James stood up, he went to sit down at the table.

James was excited to see a fridge in person after so many years; he had last seen one when he and Lily had been visiting Lily's parents. Harry had still been quite young, so it must have been at least five years ago. He didn't stop to look at the various notes and pictures Remus had stuck on the door because he had already looked at them while he had been waiting for

Remus to wake up. He found it fascinating that Muggles kept mementoes in the kitchen of all places, but then, what else would they do with all the cool magnets?

James found a decent number of vegetables and decided to make a vegetable stew. Remus hadn't said anything about eating restrictions after a full moon, but James figured that if he usually had porridge, he might need something lighter.

"Do you have onions?" he asked as he opened the cupboards and drawers, familiarising himself with the kitchenette.

"No. I avoid cooking with onions because the smell sometimes makes me nauseous."

"How about garlic?"

"I don't particularly enjoy garlic."

"Oh. You should have told me while we were cooking at my place."

"It was okay."

James glanced at Remus, who wasn't exactly watching him, but wasn't looking away either. He wondered if Remus was being completely honest.

"Do you have any allergies or something I should know about?" James asked. "I'm not asking for right now, since I assume you wouldn't have stuff you can't eat, but so I'll know in the future."

"No, not really." Remus hesitated before quietly adding, "Chocolate makes me sick around the full moon."

"That's good to know."

James took out his wand and started chopping vegetables, adding things to the pot. Remus, thankfully, had a gas hob, so James knew how to use it without having to ask.

"You do everything with magic," Remus said.

James turned to look at him in surprise, then looked back at the knife that was still finishing cutting up the carrots, and finally nodded.

"You didn't do everything with magic when you were cooking with me," Remus said.

"Oh." In his surprise, James almost let the carrots drop onto the floor. "Yeah, I... well, you seemed more comfortable doing things the Muggle way, and I don't mind either way."

Remus said nothing, but there was a sting in his scent.

Embarrassment.

James surreptitiously watched Remus, who was staring at the table's surface. Why was he embarrassed?

Was he insecure over preferring to cook the Muggle way? But why would he be?

Perhaps it wasn't a matter of preference but a requirement; maybe Remus didn't know how to cook magically. Hadn't he said that his mother was a Muggle? If she had taught him to cook, he might have never thought to learn to do it magically because he already knew how to do it the Muggle way.

But that wasn't a reason to be embarrassed.

James couldn't think of any other explanations, even though he tried while he got the stew ready to simmer. He then decided to push the matter aside.

Remus still smelled unwell, but James thought he smelled less nervous than usual.

"Do you need to lie down?" James asked. "The stew is going to take some time before it's done."

Remus thought for a moment, then shook his head. James sat down at the table, but then wasn't sure what to say.

"Do you know if there are any books I could read on what it's like being a werewolf?" he ended up asking. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable with too many questions."

Remus looked at him in surprise.

"There's only one book," he said. "*Hairy Snout, Human Heart*."

"Do you know if it's hard to find?"

"You... you can borrow my copy if you want." Remus paused, then quietly said, "I don't mind you asking questions."

"Well, I'll probably have questions even after reading the book. If it's okay with you, I'll ask you after I've read it."

Remus nodded, eyes fixated on the table. James shifted in his chair and cleared his throat.

"I'm... I'm not sure what to say," he said. "About—the—the Auror thing. I have... The way other Aurors talk about werewolves always made me uncomfortable, so I simply ignored it, and I recognise now that I had the privilege to do so because I'm not a werewolf. But I... I knew the way werewolves are treated is an issue, but I didn't know how bad it is."

Remus had turned to look at James, and there was something vulnerable in his eyes, and James couldn't help wondering if it was an accident, if Remus was still a bit too tired to keep hiding his true feelings. Because there was no doubt in James's mind that Remus did a lot of hiding.

“I don't want to sound like I'm making excuses,” James said, “but I feel like you might think I've run into werewolves every day I'm at work and been a witness to many interrogations, but the thing is I haven't.”

A small frown appeared on Remus's face. The table was so small that when James shifted, his knee knocked against Remus's.

“I don't know what your experience with Aurors is, and I don't know if you know other werewolves and what their experiences are,” he said, “And I don't know how everything works in other departments because I was trained to specialise in Dark artefacts and their distribution, and the people involved in that are usually... members of certain families that have a history with the Dark Arts. I—my understanding is that werewolves are typically involved in petty crime.”

“Or they were framed.”

James frowned. He had never heard of a werewolf being framed for a crime they hadn't committed, but then, as he had told Remus, he didn't work with werewolves. That was Butterfield's department, so Sirius would probably know. James would have to ask.

“I know that happens,” Remus said. “One of my friends was charged with assault, when all she did was talk back.”

“Oh. That—that's—that's not right.”

James couldn't help wondering who the Auror in charge had been in that case.

“Every time they bring me in,” Remus said, “I know it's a gamble whether I'll be allowed to leave again.”

“That shouldn't be.”

Remus shrugged.

“I feel like you think I'm making excuses,” James said. “Maybe I am. I don't know... it just makes me uncomfortable to think about and... I don't like the realisation that I have contributed to a system that's so... broken and unfair.”

James bit his lip and looked at Remus, who was watching him.

“Do you have any questions?” he asked. “About my career?”

Remus looked at him for a long time before asking, “How many times have you interrogated a werewolf or been present in an interrogation?”

“Once.”

Remus raised his brow, and James was simultaneously thrilled that Remus was being more expressive with him and gutted that Remus didn't believe him.

“Like I said,” James said, “I specialised in a field where I don't usually encounter werewolves. And during my training, before I started specialising, there was only ever one case with werewolves involved in the interrogations I was in.”

Remus's scent was still wary, but he didn't seem outwardly suspicious.

“You're saying that in all the years you've been an Auror, you've hardly ever run into werewolves?” Remus asked, disproving James's assessment. “I know the werewolf population in Britain isn't very big, but I also know that me and my friends have all been brought in for questioning several times over the years.”

“Well, I've only been an Auror for two years, so I assume I didn't have time to encounter more werewolves.”

“Two years?”

“Well, plus the three years of training.”

Remus frowned. His scent didn't shift, so James had no guesses as to what he might be thinking.

“I thought you started straight out of Hogwarts,” Remus then said.

“Er... no, no I—didn't.”

“Oh.” Remus shifted in his chair. “What did you do before that?”

James opened his mouth, but nothing came out, so he closed it and cleared his throat.

“You don't have to tell me,” Remus hurried to say, his scent tinted by embarrassment.

“No, I'm just... not very proud of some of the stuff I did. I... After Hogwarts, Sirius and I wanted to travel, and we convinced Lily to come with us because, well, I wasn't ready to leave her behind after she had finally given me a chance. She's—she's my ex, in case I never told you her name.”

Remus nodded.

“So, we travelled until Lily got pregnant, after which we settled down for a while, bought a house and all. And it was okay for a couple of months, but then Sirius got restless.”

James shifted and sighed. Remus was watching him with his beautiful eyes, and James wished he could get lost in them rather than have to talk about his shameful past.

“We... Honestly, I wasn't ready to settle down, so it wasn't exactly difficult for Sirius to convince me to go with him when he wanted to party or take a short trip. I did also try my best to support Lily, although if you ask her, she might disagree... to be honest, my best wasn't that good.”

James turned to look at the pot that was sitting on the stove, simmering quietly.

“We were starting to doubt our relationship, but we thought maybe it would get better when the baby was born, and in some ways, it did. I stayed home more, and we were brought closer by our mutual love for Harry, but the cracks in our relationship weren't going anywhere, although they weren't getting worse either. Until they did.”

When James didn't continue, Remus asked, “What happened?”

James glanced at Remus, then looked at the table's surface instead.

“When I was twenty-one, my parents died,” he said. “I didn't take it well. I... I didn't know how to handle my grief, so I turned to Sirius for a distraction. He was working through the loss as well, and we were a bad influence on each other during that time, just—both of us coming up with new ways of avoiding the sorrow. I started staying out a lot because everything at home reminded me of the grief, leaving Lily to take care of Harry by herself, and she got increasingly frustrated with me.”

James bit his lip.

“She tried her best to help me, but I refused any help. I was—I suppose I was angry with her for trying to interfere with my grief. Back then, I couldn't see it as anything other than her trying to control me. And I think a part of that was actually me feeling guilty for being absent so much.”

James sighed and pushed his hand through his hair.

“It was roughly two years of me and Sirius on a downward spiral. Then Sirius met Kingsley. His mate. I don't think I've mentioned his name before. In any case, Sirius found a way to accept help, and his new relationship made him want to finally settle down. I, on the other hand, wasn't ready to stop, and I was angry with him for abandoning me for a boyfriend, and we didn't speak for several months. I—well, you don't know how close we are, but not being on speaking terms with him was one of the worst things that could have happened to me.”

James tangled his fingers together.

“My grief was destroying me and everything I loved. One day, I was sitting at home, listening to Harry play with Lily in the other room, and it suddenly hit me that I knew very little about who Harry was growing up to be and that when I was around, he didn't ask me to play with him. That was when I realised I had abandoned everything that had ever mattered to me, and I finally found the will to stop.”

James glanced at Remus, who was watching him. Remus smelled soft—still unwell, but also soft.

“Sirius, of course, had no trouble taking me back in his life, but by then, my relationship with Lily had fractured for good, and we knew we couldn't fix it. Also, while she never said so, I don't think she wanted to even try to fix it. We stayed together because of Harry, and after some aimless wandering, I decided to start the Auror training, since that's what I had wanted to do.”

James fell silent. Remus was still watching him, his scent swirling around them enticingly. Maybe James could ask Remus to scent him and forget all about the conversation.

“I’m sorry about your parents,” Remus finally said.

“Thanks.”

Remus’s scent turned apprehensive, and James waited.

“I,” Remus said very quietly. “I lost my mum when I was sixteen, so I… understand how it feels.”

“Oh. Oh, Remus, I’m so sorry.”

Remus shrugged. There was an impression of saltiness in his scent. It smelled similar to what Remus had smelled like when he had cried, but not as acute.

“Can I,” Remus asked. “Can I ask you what happened with Lily?”

“Oh, sure. It’s—like I said, it was already too late for us to fix our relationship, and it just kept deteriorating. We couldn’t talk about anything without turning it into an argument, and I think she was finally allowing her hurt over my behaviour to surface, so it… We were always fighting, and it was bad for us but even more so for Harry, so we decided it was better to break up.”

James hesitated, but then decided he might as well tell Remus the rest of it now that he had already started.

“She had serious doubts over my ability to be a responsible father,” he said. “I don’t blame her for that, because at that point I had been behaving myself barely for a year after, what, six years of not being responsible, and three of those years being completely out of control. But she also knew how much it meant to Harry to have his father in his life, so she gave me one last chance by allowing me to co-parent him. She did make it very clear that the moment she hears even a peep from Harry that I’m not taking good enough care of him, she will take me to court and fight to remove me from his life.”

James gave a joyless laugh.

“She didn’t need to threaten me, really,” he said. “I had actually grown up at that point, and Harry means everything to me. I would never do anything that threatened my relationship with him.”

James went quiet. Remus gave a little nod.

“Have you had many relationships after her?” he asked.

“No, nothing serious. I haven’t really even tried to date. I’ve been focusing on Harry and work.”

Remus nodded. The pot on the stove continued simmering.

“I actually wanted to ask you something,” James then said. “Is there a reason you refused the help of a lawyer?”

Remus looked taken aback, but then said, “Aurors think that’s uncooperative, and then they have a reason to mistreat you. It never happened to me, but my friend told me.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. But... did you not think that Sirius would be nice about it?”

Remus shook his head. James’s heart sank. He then wondered exactly how often Sirius dealt with werewolves at work and how that usually went.

“You don’t need to worry about Sirius,” he said. “He’s nice.”

Remus looked away and shrugged.

“Oh,” James then said. “I almost forgot. Sirius made sure your record says nothing about you breaking the law. Although the fact that missing the deadline the Alpha Mating Registry set you is considered a crime is absurd to begin with. You know, I’m not sure it is a crime at all.”

“It would be a crime for me.”

“Yeah... probably.”

James felt the need to apologise for having been an Auror, but he wasn’t sure Remus wanted that. He didn’t know what Remus wanted, and he didn’t know how to ask.

“Well,” he said, “Sirius made sure your record is still clean. He put in a report that says you were brought in because you happened to be near a crime scene.”

Remus nodded. “He told me he would do that.”

James hadn’t known that. It felt odd to know that Sirius and Remus, who had met each other once, had discussed something that James wasn’t aware of. It also felt odd that Remus would have been okay with Sirius breaking the law to keep Remus’s record clean, but he didn’t think he should ask for Remus’s reasoning about it.

Instead, he should ask Remus about something else.

“Why didn’t you tell me I was your first?”

The sweetness in Remus’s scent was immediately replaced by embarrassment.

“It’s okay,” James said. “It’s... I wish I had known so I could have made it more special. Better.”

“It was good,” Remus said quietly.

“Yeah? Did you... did you enjoy it?”

Remus nodded.

“And... you weren’t uncomfortable? Did I do anything that made you uncomfortable?”

“No.” Remus paused before whispering, “I thought it was perfect.”

“Really? I’m glad to hear that. I—I worried that maybe you felt pressured into doing something you didn’t want to do.”

“I wanted to do it.”

There was a new quality climbing to the surface of Remus’s scent, but James wasn’t sure what it was. It reminded him of the scent of arousal, but it wasn’t exactly that.

“That’s good,” he said. “I was a bit worried about that. Because I—if I had known, I would have done it differently. I would have wanted to make it special for you.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t apologise! You absolutely do not need to apologise. I’m just... more complicated about what I... I just want to make sure you’re happy with everything that happens between us.”

Remus nodded, but didn’t look at James. James glanced at the pot and wondered if he should get up to check on the stew.

“Did you like our first kiss?” he asked. “Was it a good first kiss for you?”

Remus nodded and glanced at James.

“I liked it too,” James said. “I like kissing you.”

“Even though I’m bad at it?”

“You’re not bad at it, just inexperienced. And I definitely don’t mind helping you practise.”

Remus turned to look at James. His scent was flustered, and it made James want to smile, so he did. Remus hesitantly smiled back. His knee bumped against James’s thigh, but he didn’t pull away.

“I’m glad you told me,” James said, “everything you did. I... I’m glad you trusted me with it.”

Remus’s scent shifted again, but James wasn’t sure what it meant. It reminded him of the embarrassment, but it wasn’t that. He wished he were better at reading Remus’s scents.

“I didn’t particularly choose to tell you,” Remus said. “I was just... The full moon was coming up, and it makes me...”

“Blurt out truths?”

“It makes me irritable.”

“Oh, well, that I can believe. I did wonder about why you were so... unlike your usual self.”

Remus nodded and pulled his knee away from James. James moved his leg to press it against Remus's knee again.

“I'm sorry,” Remus said. “I'm usually more in control of myself. It becomes more difficult during the full moon.”

“Don't apologise. I— Remus, I like it when you turn all confident and... alpha. It's so hot.”

“What?” Remus raised his head to give James a baffled look.

“I like you a lot, just as you are.”

Remus stared. His scent shivered, then settled into something that was both delicious and vulnerable, and James wondered what it was that Remus was thinking about exactly.

“I like you,” James said.

Remus opened his mouth, but said nothing. He closed his mouth. His eyes were searching, and his scent rippled around them. James smiled at him.

“I think the stew is done,” he said. “Let me get some for you.”

Remus stared for a moment longer, then nodded.

James got up, and as he placed a plate of steaming stew in front of Remus, whose scent went soft as he smiled in thanks, he thought it was reasonable to say that things were looking up for them.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't have time to give this one more read before posting, so hopefully I didn't leave anything weird in.

Chapter 13 will be the last chapter I post in a while because, well, I still haven't finished writing chapter 14, and after that, I need to figure out in what order things should happen. I don't know how long that'll be because I have several fests I'm doing and several of those have a deadline in January, so I'll be quite busy with those.

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Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus had barely got dressed in the early Sunday afternoon and was getting breakfast started when the doorbell rang. He paused. Hadn't he and James agreed to meet on Monday? Had James forgotten something when he had left? Remus looked around, but saw nothing out of place.

Confused, he went to open the door, but instead of James, he was greeted by the solemn face of Dad.

"Oh, hello," Remus said. "Come in."

Dad nodded in greeting.

"Tea?" Remus asked, already headed to the kitchenette.

"No, thank you."

"I'll make some for myself. I haven't had breakfast yet."

Remus didn't turn to look at Dad; he didn't want to see his judgemental expression. He heard Dad sit down on the sofa and tried to remember when he had last visited. He usually didn't, and all their interactions took place right before and right after the full moon.

"Wasn't this sofa sagging?" Dad asked.

"Yes, but James fixed it."

"James is your mate."

It wasn't a question, but Remus nodded anyway. He cut himself two slices of bread.

"I wanted to talk to you about that," Dad said.

Remus had yet to turn to look at him.

"What did you want to talk about?" Remus asked, taking his time buttering the bread.

"I have found a new mate," Dad said.

Remus froze, then turned to look at Dad, who was watching him with no particular expression.

"Oh," Remus finally said. "When did that happen?"

“We have been dating for close to a year now, and it's time for us to take the next step and mate.”

“Oh, yes... Congratulations.”

Dad nodded. He cleared his throat and turned to look away.

“She doesn't know about you,” he said.

Remus shouldn't have been surprised by it, but he was. To hide his feelings, he continued making his sandwich, taking a lettuce out of the fridge.

“I told her my son died in a werewolf attack when he was a child.”

Remus dropped the lettuce onto the floor and bent over to pick it up, a muscle in his back twitching.

“She's going to move in with me this summer. You can still use the shed before that, but afterwards, you'll have to go somewhere else. Now that you have a mate, you have someone to look after you after the full moon.”

Remus washed the lettuce carefully under the tap, biting his lips together.

“He's a wizard, isn't he?” Dad asked.

Remus nodded, still washing the lettuce.

“Good,” Dad said. “She's a witch, too, which is why I...”

Remus nodded and turned the water off, shaking the lettuce to get rid of the excess water.

“You can still write to me,” Dad said. “But you can't show up unexpectedly. Not even before she has officially moved in. If you need to come and visit, you'll have to let me know first.”

Remus nodded. He added some lettuce to his sandwich.

“So,” Dad said. “Tell me about your mate. How did you meet him?”

Remus swallowed and blinked rapidly a few times, then cleared his throat before saying, “We met at the Ministry. At the Alpha Mating Registry. He was... he's an alpha. He's... he's James Potter.”

Remus put everything back in the fridge and blinked a few more times to make sure his eyes weren't teary. He picked up the plate with the sandwich on it and finally turned to look at Dad. Dad was watching him with a surprised expression.

“Oh,” Dad said. “Er, James Potter, you say? Fleamont and Euphemia's son?”

Remus nodded, even though he didn't know what James's parents were called.

“Well, the Potters were a good family,” Dad said. “Now I know I won't need to worry about you.”

He smiled. Remus managed a smile before he bit into his sandwich that tasted like ashes in his mouth.

He didn't think Dad would have worried about him even if his mate had turned out to be a convicted criminal who had lured him into mating with him for insidious reasons.

“Is there anything you need help with?” Dad asked. “Maybe something else that needs fixing?”

Me, Remus wanted to say. *I need fixing*.

But he said nothing and shook his head. He knew Dad was not interested in fixing anything or he would have tried years ago.

He realised he hadn't put the kettle on.

After Dad left, Remus went back to bed. His head ached, and his heart ached, and he closed his eyes but couldn't sleep. He turned his head and sniffed his pillow. It still smelled of James, and Remus inhaled, allowing his mate's scent to fill him with warmth.

Remus touched his scent gland and imagined it was James, James's fingers on his skin, then his lips pressing little kisses on the mating mark. Remus sighed, rubbing the gland with a bit more force to make it secrete more, then teasing it with his fingertips, wondering why James never wanted to play with it. Was it not normal? Was it a werewolf thing to be so interested in touching the scent gland? Did the scenting not turn James on?

Remus continued touching his gland with one hand while he used his other hand to cup his hardening cock. He imagined James touching him. He could much more easily imagine someone else's touch on him now that he'd had sex, had someone touch him with soft yet determined hands, and Remus wiggled out of his pants to take his cock in his hand.

He wanted James to touch him. He wanted James to want him. He wanted James to suck on his scent gland while he took Remus's cock in his hand.

Remus started with quick strokes, his cock already fully hard, and each touch on his scent gland made it twitch. Remus swiped his thumb over the tip and wondered if James would ever want to suck him off. He wanted to suck James's cock, even if the thought was mildly intimidating and he would be terrible at it, he wanted to try, and he wanted to learn, and he wanted to know what kind of expression James wore when he came.

Remus continued stroking his throbbing cock hard, quickly approaching the edge as he thought about the sounds James had made when they'd mated. He wondered if James had ever fucked a man before. He wanted James to fuck him, he wanted to feel the fullness of an alpha cock stretching him wide, and he came with a strangled cry, rubbing his cock until he could take no more. He gave his scent gland one last stroke, then stopped to breathe.

It had been over a month since his birthday. He didn't know how much over a year it was safe to remain on suppressants without a break, but he didn't particularly want to risk it any longer than necessary. In fact, he had already risked it for way too long. He should have done it when he had been meaning to, but the damn letter from the Alpha Mating Registry had put him off the idea of having a rut. He had figured he'd wait until after his first appointment, when he would know what was going to happen, but then he had been busy bonding with James.

He would have to do it the following weekend. He would simply tell James they couldn't see each other for two days, and it would be okay.

Remus got up and went to take a shower. He tried not to think about Dad.

Dear Maureen and Kate,

Do you know anything about Aurors called James Potter and Sirius Black?

- Remus

James had suggested that Remus take the Floo to his place, so Remus did, but he regretted the choice the moment he stepped out of the fireplace, as he found himself freezing once again, his voice stuck in his throat rather than allowing him to announce his arrival. He decided not to take the Floo again until he felt more confident in his ability to raise his voice to call out to James.

Remus stood by the fireplace wondering if he could take his jacket into the hall, and maybe that movement would alert James to his presence, but he didn't feel comfortable wandering around the flat by himself. He hoped James would peek around the corner any minute to let him out of his misery.

Remus didn't know how long he stood there. He was just wondering if he could sneak out and then ring the doorbell, when James walked into the sitting room. He made a startled sound, then sniffed the air and blinked his eyes before smiling.

"Hello," he said. "I thought you might be here soon."

Remus worried his lip and nodded.

"Let me take your jacket," James said.

While he was taking the jacket away, Remus took a moment to breathe to try to rein in the embarrassment that was squeezing his insides. Would he ever become comfortable with James? Well, he didn't think he was uncomfortable with James specifically; he was uncomfortable with the different situations and having to be so vulnerably close to someone, having to learn how to expose himself when he had spent his whole life hiding.

James returned from the hall, smiling. He came over to Remus and pressed a small kiss on his cheek.

“I made risotto,” he said.

Remus nodded. He could feel how hot his face was.

They sat down to eat, and Remus wondered if he should learn to kiss James in greeting. Possibly also in goodbye. That was what normal couples did, wasn't it? He had read about it in books and seen it on TV, and if so many stories had that detail in them, didn't that mean it was what people did? And if he thought back to his childhood, he was almost certain that he had seen his parents kiss when Dad came home from work, but he couldn't be sure because they had stopped doing it at some point.

“Remus,” James said so suddenly that Remus almost dropped his fork. “Would it make you more comfortable to come in through the door rather than the Floo?”

Remus's face was burning as he nodded. James smiled at him.

“Then you should do that,” he said. “You're always welcome to use the Floo to come here, any time you want, even if I'm not home, but you should do what makes you the most comfortable. I don't want to cause you discomfort.”

Remus didn't know what to say, so he nodded again. James seemed pleased by it and continued eating. Remus continued eating as well, but kept his eyes on James.

Should he ask James if he wanted them to kiss in greeting? James had asked him if it would make him more comfortable not to use the Floo, so maybe he should ask if James would be comfortable with kissing. Wasn't that what people in relationships did—negotiate their boundaries and express their needs?

Before he could change his mind, Remus cleared his throat. James immediately turned his attention to him. Remus was sure his face was bright red, his cheeks were so hot.

“Would you—would you like us to kiss when we see each other?” he asked the table. “When—as a greeting?”

He glanced at James, who looked stunned for a moment, before a delighted smile took over his face.

“I would like that very much,” James said. “But only if you're comfortable with it.”

“I am,” Remus muttered, but couldn't quite look at James.

“Good.”

Remus glanced at James, who looked as if he wanted to say something but didn't.

After an awkward silence, Remus asked the table, “How was your day?”

“It was good,” James said, sounding enthused. “I went to see the exhibition on Muggle electronics with Sirius, and it was fascinating. Oh! When I was visiting, I noticed you own a cassette player. Would you play me some of your favourite music sometime?”

Remus opened his mouth, then took a moment before asking, “You mean cassettes?”

James nodded.

“Oh,” Remus said. “Yeah, sure.”

James beamed at him. Remus hesitated.

“Where was the exhibition?” he then asked.

“In Cambridge Magical Museum. Have you ever been? Maybe you wouldn't be interested in the Muggle exhibition, but they also have other exhibitions. Maybe we could go together?”

“That sounds nice.”

“How's next weekend for you?”

Remus bit his lip and looked at the risotto on his plate.

“Next weekend isn't good,” he said.

“Oh, okay. Well, maybe next time Harry isn't here. Unless you'd like to meet him. Meeting outside while doing an activity might be more comfortable? Oh, but he might get bored at the museum.”

Remus opened his mouth, then closed it.

“It's okay if you're not ready to meet him yet,” James said.

“I don't think I'm ready.”

“That's fine. Just let me know.”

Remus nodded.

“How was your day?” James then asked.

“It was okay,” Remus said, and then delved into a story about a difficult customer and a book that went missing. James listened to him intently and knew just the right questions to ask to keep him talking. Remus wondered if James thought he was impolite or not listening because he never thought to ask further questions.

After dinner, they headed to James's bedroom. On the way there, Remus peeked into the second sitting room that James had only shown him a bit over a week earlier for the first time. It still looked as chaotic and lived-in as it had back then, and Remus wondered if James would have cleaned it up if he had planned on taking Remus there again. Although the last

time, he wouldn't have needed to take Remus there at all, since Remus hadn't even known the room existed.

It was just in such wild contrast with how tidy James's sitting room and kitchen were.

James pulled Remus onto the bed with him, his hand warm in Remus's, and Remus shuffled closer.

"Can I kiss you?" James asked.

Remus nodded, and after a moment's hesitation, said, "You don't need to ask."

James smiled at him. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable with surprise kisses."

"It wouldn't make me uncomfortable."

"Are you sure?"

Remus didn't like that James questioned his sincerity. It made him think of all the times people had talked to him as if he were incapable of deciding for himself, as if he didn't know what was good for him or what he wanted. But—he tried to remind himself—it was different with James because the most likely reason for him to ask was the fact that Remus probably came across as being uncomfortable with a lot of the intimacy.

And maybe he was uncomfortable, but not because he didn't want it to happen; it was because he wasn't used to it, because he was unsure of how he should reciprocate, because he had never been allowed to touch someone else's body in intimate ways.

"I'm sure," he said.

"Okay." James nodded. "Come here, then."

Remus went. He leaned towards James, who placed his hand behind Remus's head, pressing his fingertips softly against Remus's hair, and Remus vaguely wondered if James would like him to have longer hair to sink his fingers in right before James leaned in and kissed him.

James's lips were soft, and his scent was thick, and he licked over Remus's lower lip before nipping it with his lips again. He placed his free hand on Remus's shoulder. Remus's heart was hammering in his chest, and he felt as if he were shaking, his entire body trying to disintegrate because of how good it felt to have James touch him. He shifted closer, trying to move his lips in time with James's, and he wondered if James had really meant it when he had said he would love to help Remus practise.

"You can touch me anywhere you want," James said, and Remus became cognisant of his hands.

He didn't know where to put them.

The idea of being allowed to touch someone was overwhelming. They had already touched each other, he had already touched James, but he was sure what James meant was for him to

explore, for him to press his palm against his body and slide it over him, learning the contours of his muscles and even the softness of his skin.

And Remus was allowed to do that?

He tentatively placed his hand on James's waist, and James hummed into the kiss. The hand on Remus's shoulder was inching towards his neck, and Remus's heart jumped as he wondered if James was going to touch his gland, but instead, James placed his hand against Remus's cheek. Remus didn't find it in him to be disappointed because James holding him like that made him feel cherished in a way he had never felt before.

James licked over Remus's lips, and this time, Remus quickly understood that he wanted to deepen the kiss. He parted his lips for James, who licked into his mouth. His tongue touching Remus's made Remus's cock throb, and he couldn't help wondering what James's tongue would feel like against his cock. Remus experimentally sucked on James's tongue, and the noise James let out made his stomach somersault and cock harden.

"Oh fuck," James gasped as he pulled back.

Remus opened his eyes to see his flushed face right before he leaned in to press their glands together.

Remus moaned quietly and squeezed his eyes shut, his cock aching with need, and he hoped, he hoped James would touch him there. James still had one hand behind Remus's head, but the other one was now resting on his hip. Remus thought about his big fingers and how they had felt wrapped around his cock, how James's cock had felt against his own, and he swallowed heavily, his breaths coming out as little puffs of air.

Way too soon, James pulled back. He pressed both of his hands against Remus's cheeks and Remus opened his eyes to meet his gaze. James's pupils were wide and his smile was dazed, and he leaned in to peck Remus's lips, the softest of touches, and Remus closed his eyes again.

James remained close, the tips of their noses brushing together as they breathed, and Remus let his hand slide down James's side, stopping at his hip, hoping that it would tell James what he wanted. But James remained still, breathing in the same air as Remus, but not getting closer.

They sat there until their breathing had calmed down, until the urgent throbbing in Remus's groin had faded. Then James pressed a small kiss onto the tip of Remus's nose.

"Cuddles?" he asked.

Remus opened his eyes to look at him. He looked happy. Remus nodded.

James gave Remus a hurried kiss, then pulled away to lie down on the bed. Remus blinked before slowly following and settling against James's warm body. James wrapped his arms around him and sighed contentedly.

Did he not want to have sex? Remus had already thought so, but their conversation on Saturday had made him think James didn't mind him being inexperienced. Oh, but James had also seen the scars on his arms and legs. Maybe they were a turnoff.

It shouldn't have surprised Remus; he had already known no one would want him because of what he was, and that James had gone so far as to mate with him was already more than he had ever expected to have. And maybe it would be okay, he would be fine because he hadn't had any kind of sex life before, and now he, at least, had the memory of their first time to play in his mind when he wanked.

He would have a miserable rut, knowing what he was missing.

In previous years, it hadn't mattered because he hadn't known what it felt like to have someone close to him, to have someone touch him, but now that he knew, he would know to miss it.

It was only to be expected. It was only natural for people to cast him out of their lives the moment they had a chance. James would probably eventually find someone else to like, someone who was good because they weren't him.

He didn't know what he was supposed to do about the full moons after he could no longer use Dad's shed for transformations. Dad had believed that James would be there to help him in the mornings, but Remus couldn't put such pressure on someone—especially someone who had only known him for four weeks.

“What's got you so gloomy?” James asked suddenly.

Remus turned his head to glance at him, but then turned away. Maybe he shouldn't say. He shouldn't burden James with his issues.

“Hey,” James said, voice soft and his fingers equally soft as they trailed over Remus's cheek. “Are you upset about something?”

Remus sighed and turned his head so that his face was hidden from James.

“My dad,” he said against James's chest. “He's found a new mate.”

“Oh? That's good.” James hesitated. “If it's okay to ask, when did he, er... lose his previous mate?”

Remus frowned. He had thought he had told James about Mum.

“My mum died when I was sixteen,” he said.

James took in a sharp breath, then took a moment to think.

“And,” he finally said, “he's been without a mate all these years?”

“Yes?”

Why had James thought Dad had had another mate after Mum had passed away? Remus didn't think he had given that impression when they had briefly discussed his parents.

"I'm just," James said slowly, "wondering because Hickinbottom said I needed a new mate because I had been unmated for so long. But it's only been four years."

"How long were you mated?" Remus asked, then wondered if he should have simply explained how it worked.

"Since we were eighteen... so, seven years."

"Then you would have still had three years to find a new mate."

"What? Why didn't Hickinbottom say that?"

Remus bit his lip. James shifted, moving his head, and Remus wondered if he was looking at him.

"I—I don't think he was very good at his job," Remus mumbled. Then he said, "Muggle studies have shown that one year of being mated gives you one year of immunity from Alpha Outbreak after you break your bond. It wouldn't surprise me if the wizarding community hasn't looked at the Muggle studies."

"But you have?"

Remus nodded.

"I was anxious about it," he said. "I was worried about what would happen to my mate if—when I die. So I checked."

"But what if it's different for wizards?"

"It wasn't for my dad."

"Oh, right."

James went quiet. Remus remained quiet, too. Was it bad of him to criticise the wizarding community? Did it make him seem less like a wizard and more like a beast?

"Well," James said. "Why are you so down about your father's new mate?"

"He told her I'm dead."

James stiffened, and his arms around Remus tightened.

"She's going to move in this summer," Remus said at James's chest. "I can't—I can't go there without letting him know first. And I can't—"

Remus tried his hardest not to think about how much it hurt to have Dad cast him aside the moment it was possible, because he didn't want to cry. He had always known he was a

burden and a disappointment, but Dad had still always taken care of him when he most needed it. Did he really look so much like a werewolf that Dad couldn't let him meet his mate? That he couldn't exist in Dad's life?

"I don't have anywhere to transform," he mumbled. "I don't know... I can't use his shed any longer."

It was quiet. James's breaths had turned irregular, and they jostled Remus's head, which was resting against his chest. Remus could hear the air flow through his lungs.

"Remus," James said, then nudged at Remus's chin until Remus turned his head to look at him. "That's terrible. I'm sorry he did that. He shouldn't have."

Remus had to close his eyes to stop them from tearing up. James stroked his cheek.

"What do you need for transforming?" James asked. "What kind of place does it need to be?"

Remus had to take a moment to breathe before he said, "Well isolated, heavily protected, no windows, sturdy walls. Preferably an empty room. The Werewolf Registry needs to approve of it."

"How long does the approval process take?"

Remus frowned and opened his eyes to look at James.

"It differs," he said. "Sometimes they come the same day, sometimes it takes them two weeks before they have time. And I don't know if it's different when it's a completely new place. I've always transformed in Dad's shed."

James nodded and turned to look at the ceiling in thought.

"I'm going to have to buy a house," he then said.

"You don't need to do that."

"I know. But I want to. It might be nicer for Harry too, to have a proper yard. Oh, then he could practise Quidditch right at home instead of having to go to Sirius's."

Remus said nothing.

"You'll have to come with me to see the houses," James said, "so you'll have the right environment for your transformations."

Remus swallowed and turned his head.

"Sirius's house has a cellar they never use," James said. "I'm just thinking about the next full moon, since we won't be able to find a house that quickly. I'm sure you could use it."

Remus frowned.

“That does mean we'll have to let Kingsley know about you, though,” James said. “But he'll be nice about it. You don't need to worry.”

Remus was quiet for a moment before he said, “I don't think I'd be comfortable transforming in a cellar when there are people in the house. In the same building. What if I get loose?”

“Sirius and Kingsley can come here for the night. You'd be the only person in the house.”

Remus closed his eyes and took a moment to examine the feeling that had blossomed in his chest because James had called him a person, even though he would be the wolf. He wasn't sure if it was a positive or a negative emotion.

“Do you think it would be possible for me to see the shed?” James asked. “And maybe talk to your dad about what you'll need in the morning?”

“You don't have to do that. I'm not expecting you to—”

“But I want to do it. You're my mate, and keeping my mate safe and happy is important to me.”

Remus didn't know how to argue with that, so he didn't try.

“I worried,” James said quietly. “When I first started realising how hurt you are after a transformation, I worried that you were doing it all by yourself and that maybe one morning you wouldn't be able to help yourself.”

Remus closed his eyes and pressed closer to James, who curled closer to him in return.

“I'm so relieved to know you've had help,” James whispered.

Remus didn't know what to say. He wouldn't have been able to say anything anyway, as he was overcome with emotion.

“So,” James said. “Do you think your dad would have time to meet me?”

Remus nodded, then cleared his throat before saying, “I'll write to him to ask.”

“Good. Maybe on the weekend?”

Remus bit his lip. “This weekend isn't—I can't this weekend.”

“Oh, right, you said so earlier. Sorry.”

It went quiet for a moment.

“Why is the weekend not good for you?” James asked. “When should we meet for scenting?”

Remus thought about his ruts. Usually, when he skipped his suppressants on Friday morning, he started going into rut late at night and spent the entire Saturday dealing with it. On

Sundays, he was either worn out by it or still dealing with it, but it was always over by Monday morning.

“Friday and Monday should be good,” he said. “I... I need to have my rut.”

“You need to—oh.”

Remus nodded. James said nothing for a while.

“So,” he then said, voice quiet and slow. “You'd rather do it by yourself?”

Remus wasn't sure what to say. Did James mean he was willing to help Remus through it? But he hadn't wanted to have sex with Remus since their first time and had pulled away now that they had scented. Or was he hoping that Remus would tell him to stay away?

“I—I've never been around other people while I'm off suppressants,” Remus ended up saying.

James moved his head. Remus thought he might have nodded.

“I don't,” Remus whispered. “I don't know... I don't particularly want to be alone.”

“Oh, okay,” James said, sounding genuinely surprised. “I just thought—since you hadn't said anything about it, and you made it sound like you had already planned not to see me this weekend at all, so I thought...”

James paused. Remus heard him sniff the air and wondered if he could tell what Remus felt from the way he smelled.

“What are you like during your rut?” James asked. “Do you get aggressive?”

Remus stiffened.

“It's okay if you do,” James hurried to say. “Some alphas get aggressive during their rut. It's normal.”

Remus took a moment to breathe. “I don't know what I'm like with other people around.”

“Yes, but what is it like when you're by yourself?”

“I... I guess I'm just... tired.”

Remus didn't want to tell James that his ruts always made him miserable and that he spent most of the time—apart from when he was wanking—lying in bed despondently.

“Okay,” James said. “I don't think it's going to be very different with me around. Should I come to your place, or would you like to come here? You might be more comfortable at home, but maybe you'd worry less if we have the option of staying in separate rooms in case... in case you get uncomfortable.”

In case you get out of control, was what Remus heard. But James had a point. If they were at Remus's place and he turned violent, James's only option was to lock himself in the loo.

"Maybe I should come here," Remus said, although a big part of him wanted to tell James it was a bad idea after all, and they shouldn't do it.

"All right," James said. He then hesitated. "Do you—would you like to—maybe, do you think we should have sex again before your rut?"

Remus opened his mouth, but nothing came out. His cheeks heated, and he felt silly being so embarrassed over James wanting to discuss sex.

"That might be good," he finally managed.

"How about tomorrow? It's getting late, and I want us to be able to take our time."

Remus nodded, because he wasn't sure his voice was working.

"Good," James said cheerfully. "And you write to your dad and let me know when he would have time for me."

Remus nodded. He was sure he was in for a sleepless night, worrying about whether Dad would want to meet James, and wondering what it would be like to have sex with James again.

Hello, love!

You must know that both Kate and I are now extremely curious about why you asked. We should meet up someday soon, so you can tell us everything. We hope you're safe and no one's giving you trouble!

To answer your question, we've never personally encountered James Potter. I've heard of the Potters, of course, but I wasn't even aware he is an Auror. Kate asked around a bit, but it seems that no one we know has ever encountered him. I got the impression he might not work under Butterfield. Also, Kate heard a rumour he quit his job, but we don't know how reliable that information is.

Both Kate and I have been interrogated by Sirius Black. I think he was still a Trainee when he was involved in interrogating me, as he was really just observing. I can't remember him saying a word apart from introducing himself. I remember being surprised since he is a Black, I was expecting him to want to be more involved in interrogating a werewolf. Kate tells me he interrogated her last year and was surprisingly nice. He was thorough but didn't try to twist the truth, she said.

Only one of our other friends had been interrogated by him as well. According to him, Black was no-nonsense and methodical, didn't seem particularly interested in the interrogation, and was courteous but not exactly friendly. He also told Kate that he's heard from others that

Black won't go out of his way to make things difficult, but will take his time to explore all possibilities.

I hope at least some of this information is useful to you. I also hope everything's fine and you haven't found yourself in a spot of trouble. Please let us know when you'd have time to meet up. It's been way too long, and we miss you!

*Love,
Maureen & Kate*

Chapter End Notes

We have now sadly reached the last chapter I have finished, so there's going to be a break in posting. I don't know exactly when I'll have time to work on this fic again because I keep finding new fests to do lol, but I can say for certain the next chapter won't happen until some time next year. On the upside, I can say it seems likely this fic will reach at least 20 chapters if I can make it stick to my plans.

A huge thank-you to everyone who has been so supportive while I've been working on this!

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Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

James was trying his best to tame his unruly hair when he heard a voice he hadn't heard in years—and would have preferred to keep it that way. He plastered a pleasant smile on his face as he made his way to the sitting room, where he found Lily's head in the fireplace.

"Hello," he said, trying to sound jovial rather than irritated.

"Harry told me you quit your job and have been gone an awful lot."

James bit his cheek. It was better that Lily got straight to business, so they would be done by the time Remus arrived.

"He said he's been staying with Sirius more than usual," Lily said. "And he spent the entire Saturday with him because you were gone."

"I'm sure he didn't say that because I haven't been gone that much. You're purposefully misinterpreting his words."

"Were you or were you not gone the whole Saturday?"

"Not the entire day!"

Lily narrowed her eyes.

"He said you've been with your new mate," she said. "He's never talked about you having relationships. Have you been hiding them from him? How long have you been mated?"

"My personal life is none of your—"

"Oh, your personal life? It's becoming more important than Harry again, is it? If you didn't have a mating mark, I'd assume you'd started drinking again."

"I am not drinking again," James said, trying his hardest to keep his temper in check. "And I have not been neglecting Harry. Did he say I've been neglecting him? Did he say I haven't been a good father? Did those words come out of his mouth?"

"He didn't need to say it."

"So, you're maliciously taking his words to mean something that they don't. I love Harry very much, but he's not my entire life, and he's not supposed to be."

"Your life outside of Harry shouldn't be happening while he's with you—"

“Oh Merlin, will you shut up? He’s almost nine years old, he doesn’t need to have someone constantly hovering around him, and I haven’t even been leaving him alone at home for more than a couple of hours at a time.”

“I’m just hearing plenty of excuses.”

“You’re hearing what you want to hear,” James said, and was annoyed he couldn’t keep his voice calm.

“No, I’m hearing the truth, and the truth is you haven’t been spending time with Harry because you’ve been too busy with your mate, whom you haven’t even introduced to Harry for Merlin knows why. You can’t put anyone above Harry—”

“I haven’t been putting anyone above him, actually. He and my mate are equally important to me, and I’m allowed to leave Harry for a while to go and take care of my mate, who’s currently dealing with a lot of stuff.”

“I hope she’s worth losing your son over.”

James gritted his teeth. “I’m not going to lose Harry. I won’t let you take him from me out of pettiness.”

“Pettiness?” Lily laughed, her voice shrill. “I’m not petty. I’m worried about my son’s safety because his father can’t control his drinking—”

“I’ve had enough of this conversation. I don’t have a drinking problem. Talk to Harry and actually listen to what he’s saying. And maybe don’t maliciously ask questions that will only strengthen your suspicions.”

“I have not been—”

There was a knock on the door.

“My mate is here,” James said. “This conversation is over.”

“I want to meet her.”

“No. You’re not entitled to meet my mate. My personal life is none of your business.”

Lily glowered, but James turned his back to her to go to open the door. Remus stood behind it, pulling on his sleeves and looking uncomfortable.

“Hi,” James said, happy his voice came out soft in spite of his annoyance.

Remus’s face lit up in a way it hadn’t before, and James’s heart skipped a beat.

“Hi,” Remus said and stepped in.

James wondered if Remus had meant it when he had said he would like them to kiss in greeting. Remus stood before him, his scent hesitant, and James decided to go for it. They

were about to have sex, for crying out loud—one kiss shouldn't be too much.

James raised his hands to gently turn Remus's face up, then leaned in to press their lips together into a soft kiss. Remus's scent was sweet as it surrounded them, and James couldn't help smiling. He pulled back to look at Remus, whose eyes were unfocused, his lips parted and his scent still predominantly sweet.

"Hi," James said, feeling a bit silly as he couldn't stop a giggle from falling from his lips. "I missed you."

Remus blinked. There was a surge of nervousness in his scent, so James stepped back.

"Let me take your jacket," he said.

Remus took off his jacket and handed it to James. He was wearing an olive green and red plaid shirt, and James didn't think he had ever looked as sexy as he did in it. James decided one kiss hadn't been enough, so he stepped closer, and when Remus turned to look at him, he leaned in for a kiss.

Remus was still a timid kisser, but he was less clumsy than he had been at first. James cupped his cheeks in his hands, stroking the skin that was cold from having been outside. Remus seemed hesitant with his hands, placing one of them on James's waist, but it was okay; he would get more comfortable with time.

"Want to take this to the bedroom?" James asked against Remus's lips.

Remus nodded, his scent overtaken by a surge of excitement.

"Come on, then," James said.

He took Remus's hand in his, pulling him into the sitting room.

"Hello," Lily's voice said from the fireplace.

"Merlin's balls!" James turned to glare at Lily as he guided Remus towards the door and out of sight. "You have no right to spy on me and my personal life."

"I just wanted to see what kind of person Harry will be around. Is he an alpha or an omega?"

"That's none of your business."

Remus looked uncomfortable, and James threw him a quick smile that hopefully soothed him at least a little.

"Why can't you let me meet him?" Lily asked. "Is he so obviously an alcoholic?"

Remus went red and his scent turned sour. James growled and stepped closer to the fireplace.

"I'm not even going to dignify that with an answer," he said. "I have nothing to say to you."

“I’m only thinking about Harry’s safety.”

“No, you’re not! You’re using it as an excuse to be vengeful. Do you seriously think I would ever endanger him? Leave me alone.”

James didn’t wait for her response, but strode over to Remus and started guiding him towards the bedroom.”

“I’m so sorry you had to witness that,” he said. “I think I mentioned earlier we can’t talk to each other without fighting. Oh, she was Lily, if that wasn’t clear.”

Remus nodded. They stopped by the bedroom door.

“I’m going to check she’s gone,” James said. “I won’t be a moment.”

Remus nodded again, and James returned to the sitting room. Lily had left.

“I’m sorry you had to witness that,” James said as he returned to Remus. “I wish she would stop being so confrontational.”

Remus nodded. His scent was hesitant.

“Why does she think you would be dating an alcoholic?” he asked.

“She thinks I’m always only one bad decision away from losing control of my drinking again.” James rolled his eyes. “And it was never really out of my control. I always knew exactly how much I was drinking and why.”

Remus said nothing. James guided him to sit on the bed.

“How was your day?” James asked.

“It was okay. I... Dad wrote already. He could see us on Thursday if that’s okay with you?”

“That’s perfect.”

Remus nodded. An awkward silence fell between them, and James didn’t understand where it had come from. Had he lost all his romantic skills during the years of not dating? He used to know how to turn things romantic—or even sexy—after almost any uncomfortable situation.

They would get there. They had to become more familiar with each other first, and then being sexy would become easier.

At least the sweetness and excitement in Remus’s scent hadn’t been overpowered by nerves yet.

“What do you want to do?” James asked, since he couldn’t find a sexier way to get things started. “I guess it would make sense for us to do anal, since you’ll want that during your rut, but I don’t think it matters who tops. Or does it? I think either way you’ll get a feel for what it’s going to be like, but you might think differently.”

Remus bit his lip. His scent was becoming nervous. James reached for his hand and gave it a squeeze, but said nothing—it would have to be Remus's decision.

"Would you," Remus finally said, looking at their clasped hands. "Could you... would you fuck me?"

His cheeks were red and his scent nervous, but also still excited.

"Yeah, we can do that," James said.

Remus looked at him, his eyes wary, but his scent wasn't turning any more nervous.

"Will you kiss me?" James asked.

Remus looked at him for a moment, then nodded. After some hesitation, he leaned closer to press their lips together. James closed his eyes and tried to contain the emotions that were sweeping through him as Remus kissed him, tenderly and with much care. He placed his free hand on James's shoulder, and his scent spiked with joy when James wrapped his arm around him to pull him closer.

James was too impatient not to quickly deepen the kiss, but Remus seemed happy about it. James licked his way into his mouth, and Remus's shy tongue greeted him, and he wondered if he could entice Remus to take over. He tried to communicate his wishes with different movements of his tongue, but Remus seemed perfectly happy with him in charge.

Then he realised Remus might not understand what he wanted since he had never kissed anyone else before, but James didn't want to ask him with words because he worried it would make Remus self-conscious and possibly even uncomfortable. Remus's hand on James's shoulder gripped the fabric of his robes, and James hoped it was a sign Remus was ready to let go of some of his hesitations.

James couldn't wait to surround them with Remus's sweet scent, so he kissed his way down to Remus's neck. Remus's breath hitched as James's lips caressed his skin, as his tongue teased him on its way down to his scent gland. His mating mark had healed well, and it made James's insides fill with warmth because it meant Remus was his as he was Remus's, that they had both surrendered that part of their skin to each other.

Remus turned his head to expose his neck, and James's cock was already starting to ache with need. He licked over Remus's scent gland, revelling in the salty taste of the oils, and then brought their necks together. Remus sighed and rubbed his neck against James's, his hand slipping from James's shoulder to the back of his head, fingers sinking into his hair, and as James continued scenting him, his hold of his hair tightened. There was no hint of nervousness in Remus's scent, and James needed, he needed more.

Suddenly, Remus pulled on James's hair, and James followed his lead, allowing him to guide his head back so that Remus could press their lips together. They were both breathing hard, their mouths open as their lips touched, and Remus licked James's lower lip before dipping his tongue into James's mouth. James moaned, thinking about how good it would feel when Remus would touch him in other places with such confidence.

James pulled Remus closer to his body and lay down, making sure not to break their kiss. Remus settled on top of him, his hips resting against James's, and James could feel how hard he was.

James slid his hand down Remus's back to his arse and squeezed. Remus moaned and rutted his hips against James's thigh, but then there was a spike of nervousness in his scent, and he seemed to lose all confidence. James finally let go of his hand to bring both of his to Remus's cheeks. Remus pulled back just enough for James to see his face; his cheeks were red and his parted lips shiny with saliva, his eyes still closed and his breaths heavy. James stroked his cheeks with his thumbs, and Remus opened his eyes.

"There's nothing to worry about," James said. "You're doing great. I really liked how you kissed me."

To accentuate his words, James shifted his hips so that his erection pressed against Remus's thigh.

"Do you want to continue?" James asked.

Remus nodded. His hand was still holding James's hair.

"Good," James said, and pressed a kiss onto the tip of his nose.

He then let go of Remus's cheeks to take off his glasses and placed them on the nightstand—at least he hoped they landed on the nightstand, as he didn't want to turn his eyes away from Remus. He stroked Remus's hair before sliding his hand down to his neck and stroking his scent gland. Remus whimpered and his hips twitched, and James licked his lips as Remus's scent turned predominantly aroused.

Remus brought his free hand up to James's neck and teased the sensitive gland with shaky fingers. James watched his face, how his eyes were focused on his fingers stroking James's gland, how his pupils expanded and his gaze became less focused, how the tip of his tongue quickly peeked from between his lips.

James turned his head to better expose his mating mark, and the expression on Remus's face shifted; there was now something predatory in his eyes and the way his lips parted, and his scent thickened as he rubbed James's gland with more purpose.

It was so sexy James had to take a deep breath so as not to immediately roll them over and tear Remus's clothes off.

Remus leaned in to press his silky lips against James's gland instead. Then he licked, and James moaned, wanting more—needing more. He needed to be owned by his mate, he wanted to surrender and have his mate overpower him. As Remus then trailed his teeth over the sensitive skin, James couldn't help wrapping his arms around him to pull him against his body, pressing his cock against Remus's supple thigh, sliding his hands down to Remus's arse and squeezing, and Remus rolled his hips.

James had to get them out of their clothes, but he didn't want to push Remus off. He slid his hands up and under Remus's shirt, his palms mapping the expanse of Remus's back. His fingertips touched something raised and uneven, and Remus stiffened, his scent losing all confidence.

James turned his head to kiss Remus's cheek, his temple, the tip of his ear—anywhere he could reach while Remus's face was still pressed against his neck. He slowly trailed his fingers over the scar on Remus's shoulder, feeling each bump and imagining the impression of giant jaws. He didn't want to delve too deep into what had caused the scar because he didn't want to dampen the mood by making it about Remus's past, so he merely touched the tooth marks before sliding his hands down to Remus's lower back, then back up again.

"Are you uncomfortable?" he asked when Remus remained still, face hidden in James's neck.

Remus nodded, but then shook his head.

"Do you want to stop?"

Remus shook his head with much more determination.

James turned his head to kiss the mating mark on Remus's neck, hoping it would remind Remus of the fact that he was safe because he was with his mate.

"Can I see you?" James asked.

Remus hesitated, but then pulled back to expose his face to James. James smiled at him and stroked his cheeks.

"Hi," he said. "You gorgeous, gorgeous man."

Remus's scent went from hesitant to flustered, and James gave him a soft kiss before wrapping his arms around him and rolling them to their sides. Remus's cheeks were pink. He was so, so cute.

"I liked the way you touched my gland," James said. "It was sexy."

Remus looked at him with wide eyes, his flustered scent giving way to a hint of arousal.

"Did you like it?" James asked. "What we were doing?"

Remus nodded resolutely.

"Good."

James stroked Remus's cheek, trailing his fingertips into his hair before moving his hand down to his neck and stroking his gland with his thumb. Remus took in a wavering breath and closed his eyes, arousal dominating his scent. James kissed him.

"Can I undress you?" he then asked.

Remus nodded, eyes still closed, and James rolled him onto his back to have better access to the buttons of his shirt. As he opened them one by one, he couldn't help wishing Remus wasn't wearing a vest so that each opened button would reveal more skin.

Once Remus was out of his shirt and vest, James took a moment to look at him. His nipples were pretty and pink, and his chest was covered by a dusting of hair. His scars seemed to be concentrated on his arms, and his shoulder was surrounded by a bite mark, looking as uneven as it had felt. Remus was clearly uncomfortable being so obviously looked at, so James went in for another kiss, sliding his hand over Remus's torso, eliciting a quiet moan.

He couldn't wait to make Remus moan more loudly.

It wasn't the first time he was touching Remus, but it was the first time he got to do it without clothes, and he loved the feeling of Remus's skin under his fingers. He teased one of Remus's nipples, causing Remus to twitch and whine and his own cock to throb. Remus's pheromones were enticing, and James buried his face in his neck, breathing in the essence of Remus.

James needed more skin contact, so he hurried to get out of his robes, his lips and his tongue teasing Remus's scent gland. He threw his robes somewhere towards the edge of the bed, sucking on Remus's skin when Remus threw his head back. His hand trailed down to the waistband of Remus's trousers, his fingers dipping questioningly underneath.

Remus pushed his hips into James's touch, so James slid his hand down and cupped his cock. Remus whimpered, and James wondered how long he would last. It was only his second time having sex, and the first time hardly counted—it had been over so fast for both of them. James could only hope Remus would be able to continue even if he came. He thought it was important they do anal before Remus's rut.

Maybe he needed to ease up the teasing and move along.

Remus whined when James pulled back, so James couldn't resist leaning back in for one last kiss on Remus's scent gland. He then rubbed Remus's cock through his trousers.

"Is this okay?" he asked. "Can I take your trousers off?"

Remus nodded. His face was flushed and his lips temptingly parted, and James gave him a soft kiss before sitting up to open his trousers. It was probably good for him to be a bit farther away from Remus's scent gland for now.

Remus's pants were obscenely tented when James got him out of his trousers. James licked his lips and promised himself to suggest a blowjob the next time they were having sex. There was a ripple of discomfort in Remus's scent, and James turned to look at his face; he was biting his lip, his eyes tentatively meeting James's.

"Is everything okay?" James asked.

Remus nodded.

"Are you nervous?"

Remus nodded again.

“Do you want to stop?”

Remus shook his head.

James would have preferred Remus tell him in words, but considering how shy he was, maybe he found it difficult to speak when he was nervous. James had never realised it as clearly as he now did.

But did it mean Remus was too nervous to continue? But surely he would have said so?

“Can I take your pants off?” James asked.

Remus nodded and said, “Yes.”

His voice was quiet, and there was a hint of nervousness, but he didn’t sound or smell insincere. Maybe the discomfort had been caused by James stopping to look?

Pushing the thought aside, James decided to be straightforward as he pulled Remus’s pants down; there would be other chances to do it sexily.

He tossed Remus’s pants to the floor and took off his own while he was at it, leaving them both naked. Remus’s cock was even more gorgeous than he had remembered, long and on the thicker side, the red tip peeking out from behind the foreskin. James couldn’t wait to have it inside him.

And since it would be Remus’s rut, Remus would possibly be a bit rough with him.

Possibly.

Hopefully.

James looked at Remus’s face, finding his cheeks pink as he eyed James’s cock. The knowledge that Remus was looking at him made his cock twitch, and eased his worries about Remus not being as okay as he had said he was.

James paused.

He had never been anyone’s first, and found himself nervous about the thought. Was there something he should do to make it more comfortable for Remus? Had Remus ever had anything up his arse before? What if it hurt and put Remus off penetrative sex? What if he couldn’t make it pleasurable enough?

Remus turned to look him in the eye, his gaze surprisingly open and trusting, and James smiled at him, hoping his scent didn’t reveal how worried he was.

“Have you ever fingered yourself?” he asked.

Remus nodded, his scent getting flustered. James nudged his thigh until he spread his legs, the nervousness in his scent growing stronger but not overpowering the arousal.

“Do you have any toys?” James asked.

Remus’s face went red, and he nodded.

“Oh, okay. So, you’re not unfamiliar with penetration?”

“No... but they’re not very big.”

So, he had more than one toy? James wondered if Remus would ever like to use them together.

“That’s okay,” he said, settling between Remus’s legs and nudging them wider. “I just wanted to know if this is all new to you.”

Remus squirmed a bit, and James placed his hands on his thighs.

“Do you still want to continue?” he asked.

Remus nodded. His scent was an enticing swirl of arousal with only a hint of nerves.

“Let me know if I’m going too fast or if you change your mind, okay?”

Remus nodded again. James was mildly worried he wouldn’t be able to say if he wanted to slow down or stop, but he supposed he would have to trust that Remus would tell him. Remus was an adult, after all.

And his scent would notify James even if his words didn’t.

James leaned down and caught Remus’s lips in a kiss, leaning on one elbow while his other hand made its way down from Remus’s shoulder to his groin. Remus brought a hand up and sank his fingers into James’s hair, and James hummed, teasing Remus’s cock with his fingertips before making his way down. He fondled his balls, finding out that Remus liked it very much, and then made his way behind them.

Remus’s muscles stiffened when James’s finger first touched his hole. The nervousness in Remus’s scent got stronger, but not so strong that James worried. He drew slow, soft circles around Remus’s pucker, and bit by bit, Remus relaxed, shifting his hips to press against James’s finger.

“Good?” James asked.

“Yes.”

James smiled and kissed him, mumbling the lubrication charm against his lips. His fingers grew slippery with lube, and he continued teasing Remus’s hole for a while longer before pressing the tip of a finger inside.

Remus gasped, and James pulled back enough to see his face. His eyes were closed and his mouth open, his cheeks still prettily pink, and his scent thick with sex. James's cock was throbbing for attention, so he pressed it against Remus's thigh.

"Still good?" he asked.

"Uh-huh."

James pressed his finger deeper, slowly, slowly, until it was all the way in. Remus let out a wavering breath, his hole twitching around James's finger, and James wanted to feel it around his cock. He pulled his finger out before pushing it back in, first slowly, then faster. Remus was beautifully responsive, although shy about making any noise.

When James added a second finger, Remus stiffened, but then relaxed. James wondered what size Remus's toys were and if he was used to having something as thick as his two fingers in his hole. He seemed to enjoy it, at least, his hips rolling as James fingered him and his scent remaining thick and delicious.

James found Remus's prostate, giving it a tentative rub. Remus's eyes shot open before they closed again, his cock jerked, and he let out a guttural moan. James wanted to keep fingering him and take his cock in his mouth, but that would have to wait for another time.

"Do you want another finger?" he asked.

Remus shook his head.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

There was a faint undercurrent of annoyance in Remus's scent. James was too worked up to give it much thought, but he wondered if it had to do with him asking.

He trailed his lips down Remus's neck as he pulled his fingers out. Remus threw his head back, swallowing, and James spread the lube from his hand to his cock. He gave Remus's scent gland a sniff before backing away to see Remus's face as he pressed the tip of his cock to his entrance.

Remus took a deliberate breath, and as he released it, his body relaxed. James pushed inside, his tip breaching the tight muscle, and Remus gasped, his brows furrowing and a whimper leaving his throat. James stopped, waiting for Remus to indicate he was ready for more. He stroked Remus's hair, which Remus seemed to enjoy, as his body started relaxing again.

"Does it hurt?" James asked.

"A bit," Remus said, then hurried to add, "but I don't want to stop."

"Okay. Just tell me when you're ready for more."

Remus nodded. James leaned in to kiss him.

When Remus finally gave James the okay, James pushed inside slowly but steadily, watching Remus's face. Remus's scent was blooming with arousal, and the furrow of his brow had softened.

Once James was in, he stopped, his hips resting against Remus's arse. Remus was fisting the sheets, and James couldn't help wishing he had one hand in James's hair instead.

Remus opened his eyes and turned to look at James. James smiled at him, and his lips turned into a shy smile in response. It was cute and made James's smile even wider.

"You can move now," Remus said softly.

"All right."

James started slow, keeping his thrusts short. Remus bit his lip, his hands still tight in the sheets. As James's thrusts gained more speed, Remus closed his eyes, clearly holding back from making noise. That changed when James angled his hips differently and hit his prostate.

Remus's moan was delicious, and James wanted more, he wanted to see Remus let go of his inhibitions and unravel—safely with his mate.

Remus let go of the sheets with one of his hands, but instead of raising it to touch James, as James had hoped, he touched his own scent gland, rubbing it with increasing pressure as James continued fucking him. His scent was thick, and James wanted to drown in it.

The pheromones on top of everything else were driving James towards completion, so he took Remus's cock in his hand, stroking him in time with his thrusts. Remus moaned, his fingers working his gland even more intently, and after a few more strokes of James's hand, he came, his body convulsing with it, the fingers on his gland pressing down so hard James was sure it would hurt.

James had little time to revel in Remus's release, as he had been very close himself, and the tightening of Remus's hole around him was what pushed him over the edge. He pulled out, taking himself in hand, and after a couple of strokes, he came, spilling onto Remus's stomach.

He lay down, half on top of Remus, pulling him into a sweaty hug. Remus came willingly, his body supple and warm, and James pressed a breathless kiss onto his cheek.

"Good?" James asked.

Remus snuggled closer to him before saying, "Perfect."

James's heart felt light at that, and he pulled Remus closer to him. Remus's breathing calmed down, then slowed down as he fell asleep. James listened to him breathe until he fell asleep too, with a smile on his face.

I'm back! I won't commit to an upload schedule, though, I'll just post a new chapter when I have one ready. I'm currently writing ch18, so it's really a matter of when I have the time and the energy to edit.

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Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus hadn't slept particularly well, and his workday had been plagued by nerves. He had avoided dealing with customers because he was too preoccupied with the gnawing anxiety. What if everything went wrong? What if James and Dad didn't get along? What if Dad made everything awkward? What if *Remus* made everything awkward?

He wanted to call it off. James didn't really need to meet Dad, did he? And even as Remus asked himself that, he knew the answer was yes, James did need to meet Dad.

James had promised to take care of Remus after full moons. He had made such a huge commitment, and the only thing he was asking in return was to meet Remus's father to discuss the intricacies of taking care of a werewolf, so even though it made Remus uncomfortable, he couldn't cancel. He would survive an uncomfortable evening just for James.

He also knew the meeting would be genuinely helpful; James would get an idea of what he needed to know how to do, and he could only get that information out of Dad, because Remus wasn't sure what happened while he was still out of it.

That didn't stop him from being nervous, though.

Remus rang James's doorbell and tried to will his heart to beat more slowly. The air was cool, a soft breeze caressing his face as he waited. He wondered if he would ever be comfortable taking the Floo to James's. He hoped so.

The door opened. James greeted Remus with a wide grin, and Remus managed a smile. James pulled him into a kiss so sweet Remus's lips pulled into a genuine smile.

"Are we taking the Floo?" James asked.

Remus shook his head. "We'll Apparate."

"Oh. All right."

Remus was thankful James didn't ask questions, merely turned to look at his collection of jackets and cloaks.

"Does he live in a Muggle area?" he asked.

"No."

James picked out a cloak to wear and put on his shoes.

"Show us the way," he said with a grin.

Remus gave him a quick smile before stepping back and waiting for him to lock the door. His nervousness was flaring now that the moment had come. He tried not to show it, but he couldn't stop James from feeling his hand shaking when he Side-Along Apparated them to the front step of Dad's house. James squeezed his hand, but said nothing. It was nice of him.

Remus took a moment to breathe—although not so long that James would notice—then knocked on the door before opening it.

"Hello?" he called into the house, pulling James inside with him. "Dad?"

"Coming."

Remus and James had just taken their jacket and cloak off when Dad emerged. He nodded at Remus before turning to James.

"You must be James," he said and offered James his hand. "Lyall Lupin. Nice to meet you."

"James Potter. Nice to meet you, Mr Lupin."

"Please, call me Lyall. Come in, come in."

It was strange to see Dad so... perky. The image Remus had of him did not fit the man who stood before him. No, Dad was gruff and almost lethargic in his movements, and Remus had no idea when that had changed—it made him feel conflicted because on one hand, he was sorry he hadn't stayed in touch enough to notice the change, but he was also upset it wasn't the side Dad showed him when it was just the two of them.

Dad guided them to the sitting room. He had already prepared tea—much to Remus's disgruntlement because he had hoped to get a moment alone with James, to get used to the idea of James in his childhood home, but also to get a moment to quell his nervousness.

They sat down at the table, and after pouring the tea, Dad turned his attention to James.

"So," he said. "Exactly how long have you two been bonded now?"

"Four weeks," James said, and sipped his tea. "I have enjoyed getting to know Remus."

"He mentioned you met at the Ministry."

"We both happened to be at the Registry at the same time. One of the luckiest things to ever happen to me, I must say."

Dad and James fell into easy conversation, and Remus didn't know how to participate. Dad continued his charade of friendly politeness while James turned out to be excellent at socialising, which, in retrospect, shouldn't have surprised Remus; they wouldn't be bonded if James wasn't good with people. Neither Dad nor James tried to engage Remus in the conversation, and Remus suspected James knew exactly how uncomfortable he was.

Remus and Dad's relationship had been strained for a long time, so Remus should be used to it, but adding James to the mix made things worse. Could it be the discrepancy between how

Dad seemed to think Remus deserved nothing while James seemed to think Remus deserved everything?

Whatever it was, Remus felt a pressure on his chest that wouldn't go away, no matter how much he breathed calmly and sipped his tea, so he eventually decided he needed to remove himself from the situation for a while.

"I'm going to the loo," he muttered and got up.

James threw him a worried glance but, thankfully, said nothing. Remus hurried to the bathroom and leaned his back against the closed door. He breathed for a while, deep breaths, but when it didn't seem to help, he went to wash his face with cold water.

He raised his head and looked in the mirror. His skin was pale, and his chin was covered by a stubble because he had forgotten to shave due to nerves, and there were dark bags under his eyes. He shouldn't need to be so nervous about introducing his one living parent to his partner, but he was never sure how Dad was going to act and what he would say.

Maybe he shouldn't have left them alone; who knew what Dad was saying about him. He dried his face and hurried out of the bathroom, but before he made it to the sitting room, he heard Dad speak.

"He never had much of a chance with his magical education because it was more practical for him to focus on Muggle school. That poor boy still has a hard time with most magic."

Remus's ears burned.

"But he's a natural at Defence," Dad said. "He got an O in his N.E.W.T. I'm sure he has told you he also got an O in Arithmancy. He might have only taken two N.E.W.T.s, but at least he did well in both."

"You must be proud of him."

"Of course. He does his best with what he has."

Remus's face was on fire as he stepped into the sitting room, stopping Dad from saying whatever it was he had been about to say. James gave him a searching look, then put down his cup.

"Well," he said, "I wanted to ask about Remus's full moon accommodations. Would it be possible for me to see where he's been transforming?"

"Of course."

Dad led them outside. The wind had picked up, and it had a bite to it, and Remus shivered as they approached the shed. James looked around in interest.

"Here it is," Dad said, and opened the door to the shed. "I would say this is the minimum size for where he transforms, as he will take up quite some space."

“Hmm. Is it possible something might be too big?”

James looked at Remus, but Remus didn't have an answer, so he turned to Dad.

“I don't think so,” Dad said. “When he was still small, he seemed to do well in the shed, even though he took up less space.”

James nodded in thought.

“The protections are, of course, important,” Dad said. “But Remus will take care of them himself. He's good at that. He's been maintaining the charms on this shed since he learned how.”

James turned to smile at Remus. Remus was certain his face was still red from earlier.

“You need to make sure there's nothing that could harm him,” Dad said. “The wolf is... resourceful, so your best bet is to have an empty space.”

James nodded, looking around the dreary room. Remus didn't particularly want to look at it, so he looked at the garden instead. It had awakened after a long winter, the soil smelling strong, and the ground littered with fresh life, purple crocuses, white and yellow daffodils, and the new stems of tulips, all having found their vitality from the ground.

James stepped up to him and placed his hand on his shoulder, his eyes asking if everything was okay, and Remus glanced at Dad, who was closing the door, before nodding, not meeting James's eyes. He was glad James didn't insist, but turned back to Dad.

“What should I be able to do to help?” James asked.

They turned back to the house. Remus almost wanted to stay in the garden—both not to have to listen to the conversation and because he wasn't sure if he was ever coming back again.

“There's nothing you can do the night before,” Dad said. “He will be unwell, but there's nothing you can do about that. Let him rest and make sure he gets to wherever he's transforming well before moonrise.”

Remus's feelings about home might have always been complicated, but he had still grown up there, he had lived there, trying his best to survive both his affliction and his fracturing family relationships. He had been a curious child and a moody teenager, his identity had developed in that house and in that garden, and even if he never returned, there would always be a piece of him left behind, somewhere in the soil among the newly grown flowers and the old leaves left over from the autumn.

“You will also want to double-check the protections,” Dad said. “There has never been an issue with that, but if Remus is building them up somewhere new, they might not be as stable if the surroundings aren't used to such a heavy magical load. But Remus will be able to tell while working on them, so he'll let you know if there's any reason to worry.”

It was a nice garden. It had been the perfect place for him to go when everything got too heavy for a child to carry. After he had first been bitten, they had moved in, and the garden

had been his sanctuary from the sorrow and the sense of loss he couldn't comprehend, the silence that had saturated Mum and the anger that had carved Dad hollow. He had found an entire unexplored world out there in the garden, with its wild flowerbeds that were never tamed, and the squirrels that frolicked in the woods, and the worms wiggling their way through the moist earth that he loved to sink his fingers into. Mum had never reprimanded him for returning with his knees and hands and face dirty, and Dad had encountered him with resignation, telling him to take a bath, then coming with him to fill the tub with hot water and multicoloured bubbles.

Remus missed his childhood bath time.

"It's the morning after you need to prepare for," Dad said.

Remus looked around the garden. The shed had quickly become a place of pain and nights of learning to howl at the moon as his clumsy paws tried to find where the wood of the walls was soft enough to dig through, but the garden had always been filled with joy. He had explored it thoroughly, crawling and skipping and prowling, had built snowmen in it, had sat in the shadow of the oak to read, and those were the happiest memories he had of home.

Remus stepped inside and closed the door. Dad and James were standing by the bookshelf.

"I can give this book to you," Dad said. "It's important for you to know some of these healing charms, because there will be no full moon when you won't need to use them."

"I know some healing from Auror training."

"That's good. You might know these too."

Dad opened the book and showed it to James.

"This one is complicated, but necessary to know," he said. "Some months, the tearing is worse than others, but there's always a significant amount."

James nodded, his eyes on the book.

"I've never used this particular spell," he said, "but it seems doable."

"It will have to be."

"Oh, absolutely. I'm good with healing charms, so I will have it ready to go for the next full moon."

Dad looked pleased.

"What else should I know?" James asked.

"The first thing you need to do is to check what's wrong. There's always some bleeding, and the first thing you do should be to find where it's coming from and stop it. As I said, torn ligaments are a regular issue, and that should be next on your list. Broken bones happen more often than not, and you should take care of that next. The bleeding is usually caused by self-

inflicted wounds, so they will require Dittany to close, but it's not urgent after they've stopped bleeding. Remus likes to do it himself."

Remus wouldn't say he particularly *liked* to do it himself. It was something Dad had encouraged him to do himself, and sure, Remus liked the certainty of taking care of it and knowing it was going to be done how he preferred, and okay, maybe he did like doing it himself.

But he didn't need to like to listen to Dad explain everything that went with taking care of him after a full moon. It made him feel incompetent. Ever since he had been old enough to realise how much it took out of Dad to always patch him up after the full, he had wished he could do it alone. And maybe he could, if only he had a way to access his wand after the transformation without having to move. Although the charm for mending ligaments was so complicated he would probably not be able to perform it.

"He will be cold," Dad said, "so provide him with something to keep him warm while he recuperates enough to move."

"Oh, will all the healing happen without moving him?"

"Yes. Do not move him. You don't want to risk causing further damage, so all the healing will have to happen wherever he's lying after transforming. After that, he needs a moment before he's well enough to move, so get him a warm blanket."

"Can't I move him after healing him?"

Dad glanced at Remus for some reason, and Remus suddenly felt like a bother.

"You'll have to discuss it with him," Dad said. "He doesn't like to be moved around if he can move himself. And I would make the argument that it might hurt him if you don't know exactly how to move him."

James nodded and glanced at Remus. Remus squirmed under the attention.

He didn't like it. He didn't like being discussed like he couldn't take care of himself—and sure, it was important Dad told James because Remus hadn't known exactly what he does after the full moon, but he didn't need to like it. And he didn't like that James knew everything now. Now he knew how difficult taking care of Remus would be, and Remus wouldn't hold it against him if he decided it was too much.

"What do you think, Remus?" James asked. "Do you think you could be moved?"

Remus didn't know what it would do to him physically if someone were to move him before he was ready, but he knew exactly what it would do to him mentally to be moved around as if he were incapable of taking care of himself.

"I don't think it's a good idea," he said.

James nodded. "Then I won't try to move you."

“I don’t think there’s much else I can tell you,” Dad said. “Remus will take care of the potions himself, but you should get him a glass of water to go with them.”

“Okay. I think it’ll be all right. If I have questions, can I write to you?”

“Sure.”

The answer surprised Remus, but he tried not to show it. Maybe it shouldn’t have surprised him; Dad had told him he could write to him too.

“I do want to make sure you understand there will be blood,” Dad said. “You will have to expect blood and internal injuries.”

James nodded.

“Have you already prepared a new place for your transformations, Remus?” Dad asked.

“Not yet,” Remus said.

“If you have trouble getting it approved on time, you can use the shed for one more full moon. But after that, you will have to go to the Ministry if you haven’t found anywhere else to stay.”

Remus nodded. Dad clapped him on the shoulder. James held the book on healing spells close to his chest as if it were priceless.

They left through the Floo. When Remus stumbled out of James’s fireplace, James had already placed the book on healing charms on the coffee table and taken his cloak off.

“Is there a reason we didn’t take the Floo there?” he asked.

Remus opened his jacket slowly.

“I wasn’t sure I’m still welcome to Floo in,” he said.

James said nothing, but it might have been because he was in the hall, hanging up his cloak. When he returned, he looked at Remus.

“He wasn’t anything like I expected him to be,” he said. “Knowing that he hasn’t told his new mate about you, I was expecting him to be cold and distant.”

Funny. Remus had thought Dad had been cold and distant.

“How much of what he told me about you was accurate?” James asked.

Remus bit his lip. Dad hadn’t said anything wildly inaccurate about him, and he hadn’t even been supposed to hear some of it.

“I know how to do magic,” he ended up saying. “I’m not stupid.”

James opened his mouth, but paused before he could say anything.

“I’m not—I’m capable,” Remus said.

“I didn’t think you aren’t.”

“How could you not have? I—I couldn’t even fix my own sofa or cook, and Dad said—he told you. I only took two N.E.W.T.s, and they weren’t even—I couldn’t even try the very basics—Charms or Transfiguration or—it doesn’t mean I can’t do any of it. Just—just not advanced enough. I’m not stupid.”

James had come closer, and now placed a hand on Remus’s shoulder. Remus couldn’t meet his eyes.

“I just sometimes forget,” Remus said. “I don’t remember I could do things with magic because I live in the Muggle world, so my magic is a bit rusty.”

“I didn’t think you’re stupid. You only took two N.E.W.T.s, but Defence and Arithmancy are difficult subjects. And he also said you had to focus on your Muggle schooling. It makes sense to focus on that if you thought the wizarding world wouldn’t give you a chance. I don’t think you’re stupid, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with not being able to do everything with magic.”

Remus swallowed. He suddenly wanted to cry—not because of what James had said, but because he had been nervous beforehand, and then Dad had done exactly what he had feared he would and told James things Remus didn’t want him to know, and James hadn’t even said anything bad about it.

“Come here,” James said, and pulled Remus into a hug.

Remus hid his face against James’s neck and inhaled his scent. It was mild, but it made him feel secure. James pressed a kiss on his cheek.

“Do you want to scent?” he asked.

Remus nodded. He took a moment longer to inhale James’s scent before he pulled back and aligned their scent glands.

He was overcome with calm as their glands touched together and their scents intermingled. Their bond scent surrounded them, and it was comforting, and Remus wished he could always be with James, always be supported by him so that he didn’t need to keep supporting himself.

Once Remus pulled back, James kissed him, gently but with want, and the pleasant swirl of contentment in Remus turned into arousal. Maybe they would have sex again. Maybe James would steer them into the bedroom and lay him down and undress him and care about him.

“Do you think you’d have it in you to visit Sirius and Kingsley?” James asked. “You could see how much work the cellar needs before it’s safe for you to transform in. I told them we might come over today.”

Remus hadn't expected that and was rudely yanked away from his arousal. He blinked at James before nodding hesitantly.

"Kingsley is really excited to meet you," James said.

Remus couldn't say he was excited to meet Kingsley—it wasn't personal, Remus simply didn't want to meet any new people, yet he knew he would have to meet Kingsley sooner rather than later if he intended to transform in his cellar.

They took the Floo.

"Sirius!" James shouted the moment Remus stepped out of the fireplace. "We're here!"

"Just a second!" came the response.

Based purely on what Sirius looked like and how he carried himself, Remus had expected his home to be meticulously organised and formal. He had not expected the relaxed atmosphere of the sitting room, or the relaxed stance of the tall black man who walked into the room.

"Hello, James," the man said. "And you must be Remus."

His smile was charming as he offered his hand to Remus, who took it with some trepidation.

"I'm Kingsley," the man said. "Nice to finally meet you."

"Nice to meet you," Remus mumbled at Kingsley's hand.

James had already told him what Remus was, hadn't he? Remus was certain James had said so, but Kingsley seemed perfectly happy shaking hands with a werewolf.

"You've come to see the cellar, then?" Kingsley asked.

"Yep," James said. "Better to get started sooner rather than later, since we don't know how long it will take to get approved."

That was when Sirius walked into the room, and he seemed different from before. He, too, had a relaxed air about him, and he was wearing a pair of comfortable-looking joggers.

"Hello," he said. "Good to see you again, Remus. Are we working on the cellar, then?"

"Remus will work on the cellar," James said.

"Oh, do you not need any help with it?" Sirius asked.

Remus blushed and looked away.

"I'll be fine," he muttered.

"All right," Sirius said. "Just let us know if you need anything."

Remus nodded.

“I’ll show you the way,” Sirius said.

As Remus went to follow him out of the room, he heard Kingsley whisper to James, “He’s very handsome.”

“He’s perfect,” James whispered back.

Remus’s face heated.

To get rid of the uncomfortable feeling of being perceived, Remus threw himself into getting the cellar ready. It was empty, and he wondered if it had been completely unused or if Sirius and Kingsley had cleared it out for him. It was a good size—not ideal, but it should be big enough to keep him from grievously harming himself.

Sirius, James, and Kingsley all hovered by the door as Remus walked around the cellar, and Remus tried his hardest not to think about it.

He couldn’t help feeling as if he was not being trusted.

He checked the door, which was wooden and heavy, and the hinges, which were sturdy. The trio had moved to the staircase to get out of his way, but they didn’t show signs of leaving.

“Is it okay?” James asked.

“It’s fine,” Remus said and took out his wand.

He first checked the stone walls, which he was slightly worried about, but because the cellar was in a magical house, the stone seemed receptive to magic, and shouldn’t cause him any trouble.

Once Remus started building up the protections, he forgot all about his audience. He was in the zone, casting spell after spell and saturating the stone walls with protective magic, sinking a layer of protections into the floor. He walked around the room, muttering the spells, and finished with the door, strengthening it and finishing with a silencing spell.

When he raised his head, he found James and Sirius sitting on the stairs, watching him, although Sirius seemed more like he was hanging out with James rather than watching Remus. James, on the other hand, was intently watching each movement of Remus’s wand hand with his lips parted as if he were surprised to see Remus perform all that magic.

It didn’t surprise Remus to know James had lied about not thinking Remus was stupid and incompetent.

“Is that all that’s needed?” Sirius asked.

“I’ll need to check everything has stuck in a few days,” Remus said, tearing his gaze away from James. “The walls seemed to take well to the magic, so I’m expecting the magic to remain stable.”

“So, what about the inspection?”

“That will have to wait until I’ve checked that the protections hold.”

Sirius nodded. James was still staring at Remus, making him feel even more self-conscious.

“All right,” Sirius said and stood up. “Will you be staying for dinner?”

James seemed to shake himself out of his stupor and stood up as well.

“How about it, Remus?” he asked. “We could stay if you’re not busy.”

Remus wasn’t busy, but he was also not sure he wanted to stay. However, it would be impolite to say no. Maybe he would survive an hour or two of socialising?

“I’m not busy,” he said and shrugged, not quite able to meet either James’s or Sirius’s eyes.

“Excellent,” Sirius said. “I’ll go and help Kingsley get everything done.”

He jogged up the stairs and left James and Remus standing there by the door. James was still looking at Remus with an expression Remus couldn’t read.

“Is Kingsley an alpha?” Remus asked before James had the chance to say something about his magical skills.

“No, he’s an omega.”

Remus nodded. If he wasn’t careful, he would get self-conscious over being so much smaller than an omega.

“How old is he?” he asked. “Did you go to school together?”

“He’s six years older than Sirius, so… thirty-six.”

“Oh, is Sirius not the same age as you? I thought you were in the same year at Hogwarts.”

Remus should have paid more attention to what James had told him about Sirius to have avoided such an embarrassing mistake.

“We were in the same year,” James said. “His birthday is in November.”

“Oh.”

James hadn’t stopped looking at Remus with the odd expression.

“Remus,” James said, leaning closer and lowering his voice. “The way you handle your wand is so sexy. I can’t believe I find it so hot. Maybe because you seemed so confident with your spellwork.”

James’s face was right next to Remus’s, and Remus’s cheeks were quickly growing warmer.

“I want you to handle me with such confidence,” James said.

And then he kissed Remus, one hand on Remus's waist and the other on his cheek, and Remus closed his eyes, feeling several things at once and unable to make sense of any of it. He kissed James back because that was the one thing he understood.

"You're amazing," James said against his lips.

Then he pulled back and Remus opened his eyes, only to see James looking at him with twinkling eyes.

"I'm looking forward to tomorrow," James said. "Merlin, I want you to take me."

Remus's entire face was hot, and because he didn't know what to say, he gave a faint nod.

"We should go upstairs," James said, and took Remus's hand. "I'm glad you decided to stay for dinner. Sirius is very important to me, and I would love it if you were to make friends with him. But no pressure. I'll be happy for as long as you two get along, you don't need to be the best of friends."

Remus nodded again. James gave his hand a squeeze and started pulling him up the stairs. He tangled his fingers with Remus's, and there was a wild part inside Remus that sparked with joy at the idea of his mate leading him to an adventure—even if the adventure was only a dinner with his best friend.

James had been steadily pulling Remus out of his little bubble of comfort, and while it was frightening, it was also exhilarating, and Remus couldn't help wishing it would all end with him leading a comfortable, normal life. Maybe he could have a mate and friends and somewhere to go after work, even though he was a monster. Maybe he could sometimes pretend he was just a regular man, just Remus, and nothing else.

Chapter End Notes

I'm still not committing to a schedule, even though I got this chapter ready in a week. The next chapter will require more work anyway, so it will take me longer to have ready to go.

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Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The doorbell rang, and James found a nervous-looking Remus on his doorstep. He didn't only look nervous, he also smelled nervous, and James hoped he would calm down once he realised there was no way he was going to become violent. James was certain that was the biggest fear Remus had.

"Come in," James said, and when Remus did, he pulled him into a kiss. "Did you have a good day?"

"It was okay."

After taking off his jacket, Remus picked up his bag, looking uncertain.

"You can take that to the bedroom," James said. "You're free to go anywhere you want, except for Harry's room."

"Which one is his?"

"It's—have I not shown you around the house before?"

Remus shook his head.

"Oh. Well, I'll show you now."

They walked around the house, although there weren't all that many rooms Remus hadn't seen during his previous visits. Remus left his bag in the bedroom, and they went to eat dinner. Remus ate little.

"Do you need anything?" James asked.

Remus shook his head, but James had a hard time believing him. When James was going into rut, he needed to clean, and there was no way Remus didn't have something he needed to do. James hoped his rut would be good, even though he was in a place that was still unfamiliar to him.

"Do you maybe want to move to the family room?" James asked. "It might be a more comfortable environment."

Remus nodded, so they relocated. They sat down on the sofa, but there was a nervous energy in Remus, and James couldn't tell if it was because of the rut or because Remus was nervous. Remus was twisting his hands together, looking around the room, although James wasn't sure he was actually taking anything in.

"Are you okay?" James finally asked.

Remus nodded, but didn't calm down. In fact, he seemed to be getting more restless.

"What do you usually do when you're going into your rut?" James asked.

Remus shrugged. "Nothing."

James frowned at that, but before he could say anything, Remus sprung up from the sofa and paced the room before stopping in the middle of it.

"I need to," he said. "I just need to—"

James waited, but when Remus didn't finish his thought, he said, "Do whatever you need to do. It will make you feel better."

Remus nodded and turned towards the door before pivoting on his heels and looking at James.

"Wait here," he said.

James nodded. Remus turned to leave the room, but then returned to the sofa.

"Just," he said. "Just stay there."

"I will."

Remus nodded, and then he left the room. James heard him walking around and opening doors. There was something endearing about the fact that Remus got restless before his rut—maybe because he usually seemed so rigidly withdrawn. How many more new sides to Remus were there? James couldn't wait to find out.

When Remus finally returned, James was reading to pass the time. Remus stood hesitantly by the door, and James put the book down, straightening a bit.

"Will you," Remus said quietly, "will you come with me?"

"Of course."

James got up and followed Remus, who had turned towards the bedroom. Once they stepped in, James immediately found out what Remus had been up to.

"I built you a nest," Remus mumbled, standing by the bed with his head turned down. "I know you don't really—you don't need one since you're an alpha and... but here it is, anyway."

James stepped closer, nudged Remus's chin until he looked up, and kissed him.

"It's perfect," he said.

Remus's face was red, and he pulled on the hem of his shirt uncertainly.

"Would you like me to get in?" James asked.

Remus nodded, and James climbed into the nest that had been constructed from an assortment of blankets, pillows, sheets, James's robes, and some of James's dirty laundry.

"It's comfortable," he said, and smiled at Remus.

Remus didn't quite smile back, but his face brightened.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked. "Do you need something? Is everything okay?"

"Everything's perfect."

Remus nodded, and after a moment's hesitation, climbed in with James. Remus seemed determined, so James gave him his glasses to be put away and allowed him to adjust them until they were lying down, James cuddled up to Remus, who was curled towards him as if trying to hide him from something.

"Are you comfortable?" James asked.

Remus nodded. He then froze and sniffed the air before bending his head and sniffing James. When Remus didn't stop sniffing him, James started worrying he smelled somehow unusual. He cleared his throat, which seemed to snap Remus out of it.

"Are you okay?" James asked.

"I can smell you."

James paused. The amount of wonder in Remus's voice, in addition to his words, made James certain he was about to understand something new about Remus and his behaviour.

Remus pressed his face into James's hair and inhaled.

"I can smell you," he said.

"And you couldn't before?"

Remus shook his head, his face still buried in James's hair. He smelled happy. There was also an undercurrent of arousal, but not acute yet.

"You smell good," Remus said.

James's inner alpha rejoiced at his mate finding his scent pleasant. James's outer self smiled and pressed closer to Remus, who seemed content to keep sniffing his mate. It was cute.

Remus going into rut was cute. James shouldn't have been surprised that Remus would be the kind of alpha who simply wanted to take care of their partner, because it fit so well. Underneath the shyness and repressed emotions, Remus was a kind, caring man—of course his rut would enhance those qualities. And he had built James a nest to make sure he would be comfortable—extremely cute.

"Do you want to scent?" James asked.

Remus didn't respond, but he immediately rearranged them so that he could press their glands together. James closed his eyes and relaxed as Remus rubbed their necks together, their bond scent thick in the air. It smelled happier than usual, more balanced, and James wondered if he was only imagining or if it had been caused by Remus's ability to actually smell him.

Remus kept scenting James for a long time, vigorously rubbing their glands together, and James's cock was half hard by the time Remus finally pulled back and pressed his nose against James's neck instead, inhaling deeply. James glanced down and found Remus half hard as well, but Remus didn't seem in a rush to do anything about it.

James liked it. He liked that Remus was smelling him, taking his time to enjoy without rushing ahead. James's arousal was a pleasant, soft throbbing between his legs, and he wanted it to keep building slowly.

He couldn't, however, forget about the fact that Remus hadn't been able to smell him before.

"How come you couldn't smell me before?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Huh. Could it be a side effect of the suppressants? But I've never heard of that happening."

Remus said nothing, merely continued sniffing James. James wondered if the loss of his ability to smell others was caused by lycanthropy, but that didn't make sense; wolves had an excellent sense of smell. But could it be that the suppressants affected him differently because of the lycanthropy?

"Have you ever discussed it with a Healer?" James asked.

"No."

"I think you should. Have you already had your yearly appointment?"

Remus paused and lifted his face away from James's neck.

"What do you mean by *yearly appointment*?"

It was James's turn to be stumped by what Remus had said.

"What do you mean, what do I mean?" he asked. "I mean the appointment you have each year to check your hormone levels and stuff. To see you're healthy."

"Am I supposed to do that yearly?"

James turned to look at Remus, but couldn't read his face. His scent was turning sour.

"Yes," James said. "You're supposed to do that yearly. When was the last time you went?"

Remus shrugged. "I was maybe sixteen."

“Sixteen?”

James sat up in alarm, not stopped by the whimper Remus let out.

“You haven’t been to see a Healer about that for over a decade?” he asked.

Remus smelled distressed, but James couldn’t focus on it with his head reeling in shock. Remus’s loss of his sense of smell could be a symptom of something bad that Remus had no idea about because he hadn’t been seeing a Healer regularly. And what about adjusting his suppressants? If he was still taking the same amount he had been on when he was a teenager full of hormones, the suppressants could have caused all sorts of issues.

Why had Remus not been going? Had he not wanted to? Once he had turned seventeen, his parents could no longer make him go, so had it been a matter of not wanting to go? But why? Was Remus scared of the hospital? Maybe he’d had a bad experience with a Healer?

Remus took hold of James’s wrist and tried to pull him down, but James wasn’t ready to lie down yet. Remus could be sick and not know it. Had he been neglecting his well-being in other regards as well? Did he ever go to see a Healer after the full moon, or did he always trust his father to heal him properly? James didn’t want to assume, but he was pretty sure Lyall Lupin wasn’t a Healer and had only learned some of the more complicated healing spells from the book he had given James. How had he practised? Had he practised on Remus, hoping for the best?

James had a horrifying vision of a five-year-old Remus crying on the floor of that cold shed, covered by a blanket while his father read a book and practised the wand movements before trying the spell on his son.

“You’re not okay,” Remus said and sat up. “Why are you not okay? How can I make you okay?”

He gripped James’s arm gently, but James pulled his arm away.

“Of course I’m not okay,” he said, more loudly than he had intended. “How could I be okay when so many things about you are messed up?”

Remus whimpered. That was also when his scent hit James, and James turned around, horrified. Remus’s lower lip was trembling, and his eyes were swimming with tears.

“Remus, no,” James said, placing his hands on Remus’s shoulders, then immediately moving one of them to Remus’s cheek because it wasn’t enough. “I’m not rejecting you. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’ll lie down with you.”

The scent of rejection was almost suffocating, and James couldn’t believe he had allowed himself to make Remus feel as if he was being rejected. James had never been turned down by his partner during his rut, but he had heard it hurt badly. And he was ruining Remus’s first rut with a partner.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t mean to make you think I was rejecting you. Do you want to lie down?”

A tear escaped Remus’s eye, and James wiped it away.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

He wanted to kiss Remus, but didn’t dare, in case Remus took it as a sign of disrespect to him as an alpha and his need to take care of his partner. Remus looked lost, but his scent had started calming down, and James shuffled closer to him, pressing his body against his, wrapping his arms around him, and exposing his neck.

Remus sat still for a while longer before lowering his head to James’s neck. James thought about all the warm feelings he had for Remus, hoping they would seep into his scent. A teardrop fell onto his skin, and Remus sniffled, but he then pressed his cheek against James’s neck, cautiously, as if uncertain whether James meant to submit to him. His nose brushed against James’s scent gland, and then he lowered his mouth to it, taking the skin gently between his teeth, and holding James like that.

The moment was fragile, and James could hardly breathe because he didn’t want to accidentally push Remus off. Remus was holding him in his mouth so softly, so tenderly, that James’s heart ached. He hoped Remus could find the comfort he so desperately needed from the mating mark, holding it with his teeth as a reminder that James was his.

They sat like that for a long time before Remus slowly let go and straightened up before pulling James with him to lie down. James immediately cuddled up to him. His eyes were red.

“I’m sorry,” James said. “I shouldn’t have given you any reason to think I was rejecting you. I was just... surprised. And I’m worried about you.”

“You think I’m messed up.”

Remus’s voice was stuffy and dejected. James clung to him.

“I don’t think you’re messed up,” he said. “I think the world is messed up for giving you such a hard time. Remus, you’re so lovely, yet there always seems to be something new making your life difficult. And it’s not your fault at all. It’s unfair.”

Remus’s scent had mostly calmed down, wavering between anxious and calm, and James could pick up the undercurrent of arousal again. It was good; it meant James hadn’t ruined Remus’s rut completely.

“You’re not okay,” Remus said. “You don’t smell okay.”

“I’m worried about you.”

Remus’s arms tightened around him. James wondered what he could tell Remus to make him feel as if he was helping.

“Will you please go and see a Healer after your rut is over?” he asked.

“Will that make you feel better?”

“Yes.”

“Then yes. I will.”

There was no way for James to know if Remus was genuine or if he was only following his instincts of making his mate feel better by saying whatever James needed to hear. James would have to bring it up again later, once Remus’s thinking wasn’t clouded by the rut.

“Maybe the regular ruts have been enough to keep your hormones in balance,” James said. “Do you usually have three or four ruts per year?”

Remus was quiet for such a long time James thought he might have fallen asleep, but when he turned to look, Remus was frowning at the ceiling.

“Remus?”

“Why did you ask if I have three or four ruts per year? Why those numbers?”

It was James’s turn to frown. He raised his head to better see Remus’s face.

“Those are the recommended numbers,” he said. “Three or four ruts per year is the recommendation. Did you not know that?”

Remus shook his head.

“The Healer told me once a year,” he said quietly.

James’s heart dropped. A Healer had told Remus to only have one rut per year? There was no way a Healer would say that. Three or four had been the recommendation for decades, and there was no way there were Healers who didn’t know that. Could there have been a misunderstanding? If Remus had been a teenager, he might not have understood something correctly, although James didn’t know what kind of teenager couldn’t understand when a Healer told them to have a certain number of ruts per year.

“I’ve upset you,” Remus said.

“No.” James shook his head. “Are you sure a Healer told you to have only one rut a year?”

Remus nodded. “It’s good. It makes the suppressants more effective, to keep away any aggression.”

James could have cried.

“You’re even more upset,” Remus said, smelling slightly agitated again. “What can I do to make you feel better?”

James reached up to give Remus's cheek a stroke before laying his head on Remus's chest.

"I'm sorry I'm upset," he said. "I'm just worried."

"What are you worried about? Will talking about it help you?"

"Maybe."

But James wasn't sure he should bring up what worried him about Remus's situation. Could it make Remus feel threatened? Could he feel that his alpha nature was being diminished? James didn't even know where to start unpacking everything he had learned.

"I'm worried about what Lily will do," he ended up saying.

"Why?"

Remus stroked James's cheek with gentle fingers, the touch so soft and caring that James had to close his eyes so as not to tear up.

"I don't know what's going through her mind," he said. "I'm worried she'll try to take Harry away from me."

"Why would she do that?"

"If she thinks I'm drinking again, or if she thinks I'm not taking care of him for other reasons. I don't think she believed me when I told her I'm not drinking again. I never drink at all while Harry is here for the exact purpose of keeping her from thinking I'm out of control."

Remus stroked his back almost nervously, and James wished he had problems that were easy to solve to give Remus the sense of having taken care of his mate.

"Why does she think you're drinking again?" Remus asked.

"Because Harry told her I was away last Saturday. She just immediately jumped to conclusions."

"You were with me on Saturday."

James nodded and turned his head to press his face against Remus's chest. He smelled good.

"I'm sorry," Remus said.

"No." James raised his head to look at Remus. "Never be sorry for needing help. I wouldn't have come if I didn't think I could. Harry was very happy with Sirius that day."

Remus looked uncertain. James turned his head to brush his nose against his scent gland, where his scent was the strongest, and smelling him from up close like that made James feel calmer.

"Thank you for listening," James said. "I'm sorry my worries aren't easily solvable."

Remus held James in his arms, and James thought he could allow himself to push away the worries for now and focus on being with Remus.

“Are you comfortable?” Remus asked. “Can I do anything for you?”

James didn’t really need anything, but Remus desperately needed to feel useful.

“I could use a glass of water,” James said.

Remus immediately perked up, and shuffled out from under James, making sure to gently lay him down on the bed.

“I’m a bit cold, too,” James said.

Remus pulled a blanket over him and fussed with it until James told him he was feeling warmer. He then strode out of the bedroom, a man on a mission, and James smiled at how terribly cute it was.

Remus returned with a glass of cold water, and James drank it, telling Remus how much better he felt afterwards. Remus beamed.

“I’d like to wear something more comfortable,” James said when Remus had placed the empty glass on the nightstand. “Could you get me a T-shirt and pyjama bottoms?”

Remus went over to the closet and, with James’s guidance, found the correct items. He then helped James out of his clothes and into the new clothes, finishing by putting James’s used clothes into the hamper.

“Thank you,” James said. “I feel much better now. Could you still take that glass back into the kitchen, please? I’m worried we might knock it over later.”

Remus went immediately, and James sat in the nest, waiting for him to return. They’d had a sticky start, but things were already going much more smoothly.

Once Remus returned, he changed into his pyjamas, and they settled on the bed together, James making sure to praise Remus’s usefulness. If he could, James was certain Remus would have been purring. He could tell it from Remus’s scent, which was pleased and content and proud, and the undercurrent of arousal had already grown much stronger. There was also something else in his scent.

“Are you tired?” James asked, hoping it wouldn’t make Remus feel like he was no longer useful. He decided to add, “I think I could use a little nap.”

“Yes, we should nap.”

Remus made sure James was properly covered and lying comfortably against him, and after a moment, he fell asleep. James thought he might nap himself, but first, he enjoyed Remus’s presence. Remus was warm and smelled good, the arousal growing ever stronger, which meant his rut was progressing as it should. That was good to know, especially after James had learned Remus had fewer ruts than recommended. Remus also smelled perfectly at ease,

which made James relax and grow a bit sleepy. Remus's arms were holding James, and the way his body was positioned made James feel safe. And that is how James fell asleep: feeling protected and comfortable.

James woke up needing to pee. He opened his eyes blearily and looked at Remus, who was still fast asleep. It would be better for James to wait until Remus was awake before leaving the nest, but he didn't want to wake him up because he needed the rest to have the energy to have lots of sex.

James grinned at the idea of Remus fucking him, a twitch in his groin a testament to how much he wanted it. But first, he needed to pee.

James was still debating whether he should wait for Remus to wake up when he heard Sirius call his name in the sitting room. He sat up. What on earth did Sirius want?

James grabbed his glasses and headed to the sitting room to find Sirius's head in the fireplace.

"There you are," Sirius said and looked at James from head to toe. "Aren't you looking comfy?"

James glanced towards the bedroom and closed the sitting room door to stop Remus from waking up.

"What are you doing here?" he asked as he stepped back into Sirius's line of vision. "What if Remus's rut had already started, and we were fucking?"

"Already started—wait. That's today?"

"I told you he was having his rut this weekend."

Sirius opened his mouth, then closed it before opening it again.

"I don't know how I didn't realise that would mean starting on Friday," he said. "Now that you said it, it's so obvious."

James laughed and shook his head.

"So, where is he?" Sirius asked. "How come you aren't at it already?"

"He's sleeping. He wasn't fully there yet, but I don't think it's going to be much longer before it hits him."

Sirius nodded.

"Well," James said. "What did you want?"

"Oh, I was just wondering when Remus would be back to check the protections."

“I didn’t ask him how long he thinks they should be left alone before checking them, but I’m guessing sometime next week.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

James sat down on the armrest of the sofa.

“Do you think Kingsley would have a moment to teach me a couple of healing charms?” he asked. “Remus’s father told me which ones I need to know, and I may have given him the impression I’m much more familiar with healing charms than I really am.”

“Why would you do that? I would have thought you’d find taking care of Remus’s injuries after a full moon a bit more important than maintaining a certain image.”

James sighed and rubbed his face.

“I would have thought so too,” he said. “I don’t know what came over me. I just thought—this is the man who was willing to abandon his own son, I need to show him I’m much better for Remus than he ever was.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“I know. Which is why I need the help. The charm that heals torn ligaments is super complicated.”

“I’ll ask him. I’m sure he’ll say yes.”

“Also, tell him that Remus shouldn’t know, please.”

“I’ll tell him, but you’re not being fair keeping the truth from him.”

“I know.” James sighed. “I know, but I’m hoping I’ll learn without having to stress him out with the possibility I might not know how to care for him.”

Sirius pursed his lips, and James closed his eyes. He knew he had made a mistake, and he knew how unfair it was for him to let Remus believe he knew how to heal him after a full moon.

“Let me hear it, then,” he said.

“What if you don’t learn? If you’re unable to heal him, what will you do?”

James opened his eyes and looked towards the door before looking at Sirius again.

“I was hoping Kingsley could help,” he said. “That I could—that Remus would let him help.”

“I’ll let him know he will have to be available the morning after the full moon.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

Sirius barked out a laugh.

“No offence,” he said, “but you were never good at healing.”

James groaned and buried his face in his hands.

“I’ve fucked up, haven’t I?” he said.

“Not yet. At least you’re trying to learn, and I think—”

The door opened, and even before James had lowered his hands, Remus had already growled.

“Hello, Remus,” Sirius said jovially.

James stepped up to Remus, who was watching Sirius with suspicion and immediately placed himself between him and James.

“Time to go,” James said to Sirius without looking away from Remus, who was very cute as he tried to hide James behind his smaller body.

“I’ll talk to you on Monday,” Sirius said. “See you later, Remus. Have fun.”

And with a faint pop, Sirius was gone. Remus turned to look at James in worry. If he was so irrationally worried about Sirius having harmed James, he must have been right on the verge of his rut.

“I’m sorry I left while you slept,” James said, and pressed against Remus. “Sirius was calling, and I thought something might have happened, since I told him you’re having your rut this weekend.”

Remus looked worriedly at the fireplace before turning to James.

“What did he want?” he asked, voice rougher than usual, but also petulant.

“He wanted to know when you’ll be going back to check the protections.”

“Not now,” Remus said absentmindedly, and started steering James out of the sitting room.

“I told him sometime next week.”

Remus nodded, wrapping his arms around James to protect him from whatever threat he thought might lurk in the flat.

“Will you please escort me to the loo and keep watch?” James said. “I really need to go.”

Remus did, and once James returned, they headed back into the nest.

They cuddled, Remus’s arms protectively around James as James drew little patterns onto his chest. Remus was so relaxed James wasn’t sure if he was even awake. It was getting pretty late, so James wouldn’t be surprised if he had fallen asleep, but then Remus whimpered and shifted.

James raised his head to look at Remus's face. His cheeks were flushed, and his scent was heavy with arousal, but he was not fully in his rut yet. James turned to look at Remus's crotch.

"Are you turned on?" he asked softly.

Remus whined and adjusted his position. James rolled them to their sides.

"Here," he said, and guided Remus to press his erection against his thigh. "Rub here. It will scent mark me so strongly."

Remus whined again, his eyes closed, and rolled his hips, rubbing his cock against James's thigh, his scent flaring. James guided him by his hips, encouraging him to keep going until he was a moaning, panting mess, every noise he made going straight to James's cock, which was straining against the front of his pyjama bottoms. Remus was breathing hot air against James's neck, and then he came, almost suddenly, with a quiet moan that made James's cock throb. James stroked his back as he came down, feeling immense joy in being allowed to see Remus like that, most of his reservations forgotten.

"What about you?" Remus asked.

He placed a tentative hand on James's cock and gave it a gentle squeeze. James moaned and pressed against his hand.

"Do you want me to—?"

"Yes." James nodded. "Yes, if you could."

Remus slipped his hand under James's pyjama bottoms, stroking him a couple of times before pulling the bottoms down to expose James's dripping cock. James was expecting a hand job, but Remus hesitated.

"Is it okay if I—" he asked. "Can I—"

"Yes, you can do whatever you want."

James was still expecting a hand job, but Remus slid down on the bed instead, bringing his face close to James's cock.

"Oh," James said. "Do you want to?"

Remus bit his lip and nodded, looking at James with his pretty eyes.

"Would it make you happy?" Remus asked.

"Very. But I'll be very happy with whatever you choose to give me."

Remus nodded. He hesitated for a while longer, but then took James's cock in his hand and gave it a tentative lick. James watched his face as he kept licking, acquainting himself with the length before cautiously taking the tip in his mouth.

It was clumsy, but Remus was eager to please, and James loved it, watching Remus suck him, how his lips stretched around him and how his eyes shone every time he looked up to make sure James was enjoying it. James was the first person Remus had ever sucked, and that knowledge was quickly pushing James towards the edge. He was the first one, and Remus wanted it, and Remus wanted him to like it, and he tried so hard to be good to James, and James was almost too late to warn him when he was about to come.

Remus caught James's semen on his hand, and once he was certain James was all right, he reached for his wand and cleaned up both his hand and his pants.

"Do you want to take a shower?" James asked.

Remus shook his head, but then went thoughtful. He looked longingly towards the door, but then eyed the nest in worry.

"I can come with you, so you don't need to leave me alone," James said.

Remus thought for a moment longer before nodding.

James sat on the toilet while Remus showered, constantly peeking from behind the shower curtain to make sure James was still there and not threatened by anything. James tried his hardest not to laugh because he didn't want Remus to think he was making fun of him, but it was extremely cute.

Once they returned to the nest, they cuddled, and James started getting sleepy, eventually closing his eyes to rest them. He must have dozed off because he woke up to Remus giving him a gentle shake.

"Is it time?" he asked blearily.

Remus's forehead was sweaty and his cheeks pink. He nodded, and James yawned, rubbed at his eyes, and felt more awake after that.

"How do you want me?" James asked.

"Can I undress you?"

"Sure."

Remus didn't wait, but immediately peeled the T-shirt off James's body, his pyjama bottoms following close behind. James watched Remus undress in a rush, tossing his clothes to the floor until he was naked, only him, without the protective layer of clothes. James wanted to touch him, but restrained himself.

"How do you want me?" he asked.

Remus looked at him for a long time, his jaw working, but no words coming out.

"Should I lie down?" James asked.

Remus nodded. James lay down and looked at Remus with a grin.

“Feel free to do whatever you please,” he said. “I’m here for your pleasure.”

Remus looked like he wanted to argue, but the arousal in his scent had overpowered everything else, so he seemed to decide against it. Instead, he lay down next to James, his hand hovering over James’s body as if too afraid to touch. James wasn’t sure if it would be the right move, but he then placed his hand on top of Remus’s and pressed it against his chest.

“You can touch me anywhere and in any way you like,” he said.

Remus’s eyes were round as he looked at his hand on James’s chest. James lifted his hand away, but Remus kept his own there. He watched it for a long time before turning to look at James.

“Can I kiss you?” he asked quietly.

“Of course. You can touch me in any way you like.”

Remus bit his lip, but then leaned in to kiss James. It was a soft brush of lips, tentative and shy, but Remus then pressed their lips more firmly together, still hesitant, but the rut seemed to be giving him courage, as he soon deepened the kiss. It was only the second time Remus had kissed James like that, taking the first step and forgetting about his hesitations, his tongue in James’s mouth and his hand on James’s chest, and James wanted him to own him. He wanted Remus to take him apart bit by bit, and the kiss was an excellent start.

Remus moved on too quickly in James’s opinion—although he found it hard to complain when Remus’s lips found his neck, pressing open-mouthed kisses along it. James sighed and turned his head to give Remus more room. Once Remus got to his scent gland, he grazed the skin with his teeth before sucking, making James’s steadily filling cock twitch.

Remus licked the gland for a good while before pressing his nose against it and inhaling. He nuzzled against James’s neck, rolling his hips languidly to rub his cock against James’s hip. He seemed happy simply to breathe James in for a while, his mouth open and his breath moist on James’s skin.

Little by little, Remus started moving, his lips brushing James’s skin, although seemingly not on purpose. He ended up with his nose in James’s armpit, sniffing, and James moved his arm out of the way to allow him closer. Remus’s scent was thick and dripping with want, and James wondered if he smelled as good to Remus as Remus smelled to him. He had never had a partner interested in smelling him so thoroughly. Could it be caused by Remus’s usual inability to smell people?

Remus’s hand was warm as it slid over James’s chest and up to his shoulder, his fingers slipping into his other armpit before travelling down his side. Remus’s lips found James’s skin, and after one last inhale, he kissed his way onward, his mouth finding James’s nipple next. He licked the nub, his hand on James’s stomach, and James was fully hard, arching his back to press his nipple closer to Remus’s exploring mouth.

“Oh, Remus.”

Remus gave James’s nipple a suck, then nipped it with his teeth, his hand sliding up to his other nipple to tease it with rough fingertips. He seemed to know exactly how to drive James absolutely wild, caressing and tugging and nipping, and by the time he finally lifted his mouth away, James’s cock was drooling pre-come all over his stomach.

Remus moved down, leaving sloppy kisses in his wake as he moved from James’s chest to his stomach, his hand sliding down faster and stopping at his hip. James could not understand how Remus had the patience to do anything other than stick his cock in, as he himself couldn’t stand the ache of the rut, which was telling him to fuck or perish.

Maybe Remus got pleasure out of touching him in other ways, too? If he was the kind of alpha to want to take care of his partner, wouldn’t that also extend into the bedroom?

It didn’t really matter. The only thing that mattered was that Remus was touching him with confidence, mapping his body with his tongue and his lips, his hand gripping the flesh with gentle fingers. He licked the pre-come off James’s skin, and James moaned when his tongue touched the tip of his cock. Remus smelled like sex, like the heat right underneath the skin, and James wanted Remus to rub it all over him, to bathe him in it, to mark him as his.

Remus’s tongue dipped into James’s belly button before he nosed at James’s happy trail, and James suddenly felt exposed and cared for, vulnerable, but in a safe way, and Remus was lapping him up into his mouth, cleaning him up, cleaning him out, and James never wanted him to stop.

Remus stuck his nose into James’s pubic hair and inhaled, the tip of his nose brushing against the base of James’s cock. He sniffed closely, his own scent remaining softly pleased, and James wondered if he should have been sniffing people more closely too. He felt utterly naked, knowing that Remus’s nose was picking up everything, but he also felt wanted, and he could imagine that the one doing the sniffing might get something out of it as well. Remus was clearly getting something out of it, shifting to press his cock into the bed as his nose remained in James’s pubes, and James wanted to know what it was.

Maybe he would do it during his next rut. The rut might make it nicer.

Remus nosed at James’s balls, his open mouth breathing moist air onto them, and James spread his legs to give Remus more space. Remus moved to the crook of his leg, finding the scent gland there and giving it a lick, then a suck, and James shivered. He felt splayed out, he felt opened up, and Remus was holding the keys to him.

Remus moved below James’s balls, sniffing eagerly, and that started to feel too open, too vulnerable. Yet James didn’t tell him to stop. He didn’t want to make Remus feel bad, but there was also a secret part of him that liked it, liked the terrible uncertainty of being too something—too human in his body with its bodily functions—because if Remus didn’t pull away, if he could accept James as the body he was, then James would feel even safer with him.

Remus's scent was happy, almost serene underneath the turmoil of his rut. He breathed James in, then nosed at his balls before kissing his thigh. His lips were questioning, soft, as if he had suddenly remembered his usual nervousness, but then he gave James's sensitive flesh a sharp bite and pulled away even before James had properly yelped.

"You need to turn around," Remus said.

"Do you want me on my hands and knees?" James sat up to turn around. "Or do you want me to present to you?"

Remus whined and gripped his cock at the base, his scent flaring with want, and James smirked. He didn't ask again, merely got on his hands and knees before lowering his upper body to the bed. He could hear Remus's heavy breaths, and he could smell Remus's heavy scent, and soon, he could feel Remus's heavy hand on his hip, moving to caress the flesh of his arse. He parted James's cheeks with both hands, leaning in to smell him, and James wished he were already prepped and ready to go because he wanted—no, he needed Remus to fuck him immediately.

Remus leaned in so close that the tip of his nose pressed against James's crack, his hot breath teasing the sensitive skin, and James was sure he was about to lick him. His hole twitched in anticipation, but then Remus pulled away, letting go completely.

James turned his head, but couldn't properly see what Remus was doing from his position. He soon found out, as one of Remus's hands returned to pull his cheeks apart, while the other one returned to brush a slick finger over his hole. James sighed and closed his eyes, aching for Remus to penetrate him, but all Remus did was stroke his entrance on the outside, smearing the skin with lube. James's cock was dangling between his legs, rock hard and dripping, yet Remus seemed to be in no rush.

Wasn't it supposed to be the other way around? Wasn't Remus supposed to be the one gagging for it while James was more collected in his mind that wasn't clouded by his rut?

Remus was showing an unbelievable amount of restraint for someone in their first rut with a partner.

"Aren't you in any rush?" James blurted out.

Remus hummed and rubbed James's hole, the tip of his finger almost dipping in.

"I never thought I would get to have this," he said. "That I would have a partner in the first place, but also to have someone to help me through my rut."

He finally, finally pushed his finger past the tight muscle of James's entrance, and James sighed.

"I was always miserable during my rut," Remus said. "It hurt so much I sometimes thought I wouldn't be able to take it. That I had finally reached the limit. I spent most of the time lying in bed because I couldn't move."

Remus's finger found James's prostate, as if he had known exactly where it was, but James's pleasure was dampened by what Remus was telling him.

"I could never feel fulfilled," Remus said. "And with you—"

Remus's finger stopped. He breathed in and out, sitting very still, and James wanted to turn around to see what he looked like.

"It feels so good," Remus said. "Everything. I haven't—I've never built a nest, but building it for you felt so—and then you liked it too. And you let me touch you at my own pace, and you're so patient with everything, and—and to get to have all my firsts with someone like you..."

Remus pulled his finger out and added a second one, the stretch already feeling exquisite, although James had a hard time focusing on it because his mind was preoccupied with what Remus was saying.

"I feel so good," Remus said. "Taking care of you. And existing next to you. With you. And you let me—I've never felt this fulfilled. I didn't know it could feel like this."

He twisted his fingers and James moaned, his cock twitching. He almost wanted to cry because everything he learned about Remus was so sad, but also because Remus was telling him he could make him feel important and that he could offer him a way to be the alpha his instincts were telling him to be. It made him feel important, too.

Remus added a third finger, fucking James with them slowly. Then there was an abrupt change in his scent.

James had thought Remus had already been deep in his rut, but he had been wrong. Remus's pheromones turned cloyingly heavy, and he moaned, rutting his hips against James's leg for stimulation. He pulled his fingers out and whined, and it sounded like he was rubbing himself.

"I'm ready," James said. "Fuck me, Remus."

After a couple of wet tugs, Remus whined and repositioned himself behind James, one hand keeping James's cheeks parted while the other one positioned his cock at James's entrance. Before James could encourage him further, he had already pushed the tip in, the sudden stretch burning, but James liked it, liked being taken in a rush, with confidence, with disregard for his comfort. Remus fucked into him with sharp thrusts, giving him no time to get used to it, and he loved it.

James fisted his hands into the beddings as Remus started a punishing pace, pulling James into each thrust by his hips, skin slapping against skin, and James moaned, each snap of Remus's hips pushing a noise out of him. He could do nothing but hold on, his toes curling into the sheets, and Remus's hands were tight around his hips.

Remus leaned down, his chest against James's back and his panting breaths in James's ear. He smelled of pure sex, carnality and lust, and James's cock was so hard it ached, yet he

couldn't let go of the beddings to take it in his hand. And it wasn't about his pleasure anyway, it was about Remus's, and even then, he was getting a lot out of shy, restrained Remus fucking him into the mattress.

"Yes," James panted. "Fuck, yes."

Remus growled, and his lips sought out James's mating mark. James bared his neck for him, moaning when a shift in his position made Remus brush against his prostate with each thrust. James was almost certain that Remus's knot was already swelling, and he couldn't wait to have it inside him, couldn't wait to experience the intimacy of a knotting from the receiving end for the first time.

Remus opened his mouth and took James's mating mark between his teeth, pressing down hard, and James loved it, loved the possessiveness—remembering how Remus had growled at Sirius—and the way Remus's swelling knot stretched him open. He opened his mouth to call out Remus's name, but changed his mind at the last moment because there was something else Remus needed to hear.

"Alpha!"

Remus's hips stuttered and his hands gripped James's hips harder, a moan rising from his chest.

"Alpha." James was panting hard. "Yes, Alpha. It feels so good."

Remus let out a sound that sounded almost wounded, and he bit down harder when his knot started catching on James's hole.

"Make me yours," James breathed out.

Remus slammed his hips into James for the last time, his knot locking them together, and came with a guttural moan, filling James to the brim. He had released James's neck, and soothed the stinging of his skin with tired licks before guiding James to lie down with him, his panting breaths moist puffs on James's shoulder. He smelled satiated, but there was still an undercurrent of burning arousal, and James tried to remember if Remus had told him how many times he usually needed to knot before the rut subsided. His cock was throbbing, but before he could do anything about it, there was a shift in Remus's scent.

"Are you crying?" James asked.

Remus sniffled. James tried to see him, but he had turned his face away. James reached behind himself to give his head a clumsy pat.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

He wished they were face to face so that he could give Remus a hug. Instead, he had to content himself with stroking Remus's arm, which was wrapped around his waist.

"I'm sorry," Remus mumbled.

“Don’t apologise. Is there anything I can do?”

He felt Remus shake his head.

“Did something happen that you didn’t like?” James asked.

Remus shook his head again.

“Are you hurt?”

Remus sobbed and pulled James closer against his chest.

“Is it just a bit overwhelming?” James asked. “This was your first rut with a partner.”

Remus moved his head, but James wasn’t sure if it was a nod.

“I didn’t think I would ever have this,” Remus whispered before James could ask him more questions. “I didn’t think I would ever have someone to hug, let alone to knot.”

James didn’t know what to say, so he pressed closer to Remus and gripped his arm, stroking the skin with his thumb.

“I’m sorry,” Remus said. “I’m ruining it for you. You didn’t even get to come. I’m sorry.”

“There’s no need to apologise, Remus. I did also once have a first rut with a partner, and I know how... big it feels to knot someone for the first time. I get it.”

Remus shifted, his hand brushing James’s back before he leaned up on his elbow.

“I have tissues in the drawer there,” James pointed at his nightstand. “Do you think you can reach them?”

Remus leaned over James and managed to open the drawer, but couldn’t quite grasp the box of tissues.

“Should I get it for you?” James asked quietly.

“Please.”

Remus sounded miserable, and James couldn’t know if it was because of his emotional outburst or because he had to rely on his partner to help him while he was in rut and his instincts were wild. James got him the box, and Remus wiped his face before placing the box on the bed next to the nest.

“I want to make you feel good,” he said.

“I would like that.”

James wasn’t only saying it to cater to Remus’s need to please; now that Remus was calm again, James couldn’t help focusing on the knot filling him up. It was even hotter than he had thought, and the way Remus’s knot fit snugly inside him made his flagging cock fill again.

Even just the knowledge that he was bound to Remus was turning him on, and when Remus placed his hand on James's chest, his thumb teasing a nipple, James sighed happily.

"Do you like that?" Remus asked.

"Yes, it feels lovely."

James squirmed as Remus continued teasing his nipple, flicking it with his thumb before taking it between his fingers and pinching it gently.

"Harder," James said, and broke into a moan when Remus pinched harder and gave the nipple a little tug.

Every touch on his nipples went straight to James's cock, and by the time Remus slid his hand down to James's stomach, he was back to full hardness. Remus's hand was warm and sturdy, his fingers long, and he dragged his fingertips through James's happy trail before stopping at the base of James's cock.

"Is this okay?" he asked, sounding more like his uncertain self again.

"Yes. Please. I want you to touch me."

Remus took James's cock in his hand, first gently, as if worried he might hurt James, but he then seemed to find his confidence again, and gave James's cock a firm stroke. James's mouth opened into a moan, and he squirmed, unable to decide if he wanted to thrust into Remus's hand or push back onto Remus's cock. Remus ground his hips forward, his knot pressing against James's prostate while he continued stroking, rubbing the tip of James's cock with his thumb with each upstroke.

James came with a gasp, his hole tightening around Remus's knot as he spilt over Remus's hand, and Remus stroked him through it, milking him dry. His touch was confident, and James loved it, loved the way Remus was when he allowed his alpha out.

Remus continued grinding into James until he came, letting out a cute little moan. He smelled good, and James leaned into him, very much enjoying being held. Remus wiped his hand on the sheets before pulling James closer, his arm a comforting weight on his waist and his knot a comforting weight inside him. James had always loved knotting someone because of the connection it created, and he loved it equally much when he was the one being knotted. Remus felt safe, and James quite enjoyed feeling smaller than he really was—small because of the way Remus held him as if he needed protecting.

Remus was stroking James's stomach and chest, his touch soothing, and it took James a moment to realise he was rubbing his wrist gland against him, scenting him. It made James feel even safer, even more cared for, and he would have gladly stayed there forever. Remus nosed at his scent gland, and he turned his head aside. Remus smelled happy.

They remained like that for a long time. Then Remus got restless, wriggling against James and huffing in frustration. His scent was headier again, and James experimentally tightened his hole around his knot, and Remus whined.

“Do you need to come again?” James asked.

Remus said nothing, but made a little thrusting motion with his hips.

“I would like it if you came again,” James said, hoping it was the right way to make Remus feel better about needing another orgasm.

“Really?”

“Yes, really. I think it’s hot.”

Remus wiggled his hips, and after a moment’s hesitation, started a small movement, thrusting as much as he could with his knot still inside James. James didn’t think he could get hard again so soon after his orgasm, but that didn’t stop him from enjoying the way Remus’s knot pressed into his prostate.

It didn’t take long for Remus to come, forehead pressed against James’s shoulder as he grunted quietly. James reached back to stroke his hip, wishing he could turn around to wrap his arms around Remus and just hold him.

He would get a chance to do so shortly, it seemed, as Remus’s knot had started going down. James found himself disappointed in the fact that the knot hadn’t lasted longer. Not that he thought it had been any different from how long his own knot usually lasted, but he had thoroughly enjoyed being knotted to Remus.

Remus might still knot him again.

Once Remus’s cock slipped out of James’s hole, James turned around and smiled at Remus, whose hair was ruffled and face flushed.

“Hi,” James said.

Remus responded with the cutest smile.

“Do you think you’ll have to knot me again?” James asked.

“I don’t think so.” Remus shook his head. “I don’t usually feel this... content after one knot. I don’t think I’ll need a second one.”

“All right.”

James shuffled closer to Remus to wrap his arms around him and press his face against his sweaty chest.

“How many knots has it usually taken?” he asked. “Just out of curiosity.”

“Three or four. Sometimes even five.”

“Oh.” James frowned. “That’s a lot.”

Could it be caused by the abuse of suppressants? But in that case, shouldn't it have taken Remus more than one knot to be satisfied now? Was it really all because he'd been with a partner?

"It's the worst," Remus said, sounding sleepy. "It never ends, and it hurts, and sometimes I've only barely come out of my rut by the time I need to go to work."

"Well, I'm glad this time was much nicer for you."

Remus nodded against James's head. They lay quietly for a while.

"Are you very tired?" James asked then. "I think I'd like to shower."

"Yes. Yes, shower."

Remus sounded tired, but before James could tell him he could wait, Remus had already sat up and stumbled out of the nest. James followed.

"Do you want to shower together?" James asked.

Remus's face went red, and his scent turned embarrassed. His rut really seemed to be over.

"We don't have to," James said.

"Do you want to?"

James wondered what to say. He wanted to shower with Remus, but he was almost certain Remus would take that as something he needs to do to keep James happy, and he didn't want that.

"We don't have to," James said.

"But you want to."

"Remus, I want you to do what makes you comfortable. If showering together doesn't make you comfortable, I'll be much happier not showering with you."

Remus bit his lip, but didn't argue. They walked to the bathroom door, where Remus hesitated.

"Would you like to keep me company?" James asked.

Remus looked around, as if trying to figure out what threats James might encounter if left alone. He then opened the bathroom door and gestured for James to enter.

"I'll keep you company," he said, sounding far less confident than before.

James showered while Remus stood at the door, his back to James, although he occasionally glanced back, probably to make sure James was okay. He showered after James, and James waited for him, sitting on the toilet.

“Would you like to eat something?” James asked.

“Are you hungry?”

“A bit, yeah.”

“Then yes.”

James smiled at the shower curtain and wondered if Remus was going to take his suppressants now that his rut was over or if he was going to wait until Monday morning. Or Sunday evening, he didn't know when Remus usually took them.

They went to eat. Remus hadn't sounded very enthusiastic about the idea, but once he had food in front of him, he ate a lot. James *had* been wondering how he was faring with the little bit he had eaten before his rut.

“How are you feeling?” James asked once Remus had finished his meal.

“Okay.”

Remus seemed to be back to his normal, withdrawn self. His scent still had some characteristics of his rut, but it wasn't enough to give Remus the confidence he'd had during it. He seemed slightly restless, though, his leg bouncing and his fingers playing with the hem of his shirt.

“Do you need something?” James asked.

Remus shrugged.

James couldn't lie—it was frustrating to try to decipher what Remus's wants and needs were when he wouldn't communicate them. James was fully aware they had only known each other for a few weeks, but he couldn't help wishing Remus would gain courage a bit faster.

“Would you like to return to the nest?” James asked.

It was a guessing game, and James could only base his guesses on what Remus's instincts had made him require so far.

“Do you want to?” Remus asked.

“Yeah. I'm getting tired.”

James turned to look at the time. It was seven in the morning.

“We should sleep,” he said.

Remus nodded, and after a moment's hesitation, he got up and waited for James to go first. James couldn't tell if it was because Remus still felt the need to keep an eye on him to protect him, or if it was because he felt uncomfortable leading James around in his own house.

They settled into the nest, and Remus still seemed to need to hold James, so James happily snuggled up to him. Remus sniffed his hair.

“Will you scent me in the morning?” James asked and yawned.

“Sure.”

James quickly fell asleep. He woke up a few hours later because Remus was hard again, helped Remus get off, and then went back to sleep with a smile on his face.

He was glad Remus’s first rut with a partner had been good.

Chapter End Notes

I've been busy, and will be busy for weeks to come, so I don't know how long it will take me to get the next chapter edited. Especially because I have been distracted by other fics lol

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Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus was sitting in the reception area at St Mungo's, nervously pulling on his sleeve. Before coming, he had gone to the Werewolf Registry to let them know he would no longer be transforming in the shed, but they hadn't told him when someone would come to check everything was in order. It might be too late for the next full moon. If that happened, Remus could still go home for the full moon, but what if the Werewolf Registry took so long that the inspection wasn't done by the full moon after that? He would have to go to the Ministry, and he hadn't heard anything good about the Ministry's facilities.

"Lupin?"

Remus got up and followed the Healer into a room. He was nervous about that too, but the Healer was young, which might mean she wasn't as prejudiced as the older Healers. Or she might be more prejudiced—Remus didn't know what they taught about werewolves at Hogwarts.

"Sit down, please," the Healer said, sitting down by her desk. "I'm Healer Braithwaite."

Remus nodded to her. She looked at him from head to toe.

"I saw in your file you haven't been to see a Healer about your suppressants in well over a decade. Has something changed?"

Remus cleared his throat.

"My mate told me I should see a Healer yearly," he said. "And that I have been using my suppressants incorrectly."

Healer Braithwaite took a quill and wrote something on the piece of parchment before her.

"How does your mate think you've used your suppressants incorrectly?" she asked.

"He said I should have three to four ruts a year."

"And how many have you been having?"

"One."

Healer Braithwaite nodded and scribbled on the parchment before turning to look at him.

"With all due respect, Mr Lupin," she said, "is your mate a Healer?"

Remus shook his head, wondering how much respect Healer Braithwaite thought was due.

“As I said, I have looked through your file,” she said, “and I see nothing out of the ordinary. You are not a person. You are a werewolf. And when it comes to alpha werewolves, we must eliminate any chance of aggression. When you take your suppressants for a full year before having a rut, the chances of aggression are greatly diminished.”

Remus nodded.

“Has it caused any side effects?” Healer Braithwaite asked.

“I can’t smell people very well.”

Healer Braithwaite wrote something down.

“And is this affecting your quality of life?” she asked without looking up.

“I can’t smell my mate. It’s hard to know what he thinks or how he feels.”

Healer Braithwaite nodded and wrote something before looking at him.

“That is a minor price to pay for safety, wouldn’t you say?” she asked.

Remus hesitated. Before his rut, when he hadn’t been able to smell James, he would have agreed wholeheartedly, but now that he knew how good James smelled, how well he could tell what he was feeling, he wasn’t so sure.

“If I were to have three to four ruts a year,” he asked slowly, “would it make it possible for me to smell him?”

“You will not be having more than one rut a year, so I don’t think it matters.”

Remus bit his lip.

“You must stop being selfish,” Healer Braithwaite said. “For you to be a part of our society, you will need to consider what you can do to keep other people safe from you. You make sure you can’t escape during the full moon, do you not?”

Remus nodded.

“This is the same thing,” Healer Braithwaite said. “You will take your suppressants as instructed to keep others safe. Do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“Good. Has the dosage seemed good? Do you experience any aggression while on suppressants?”

“I haven’t had any issues.”

“Good.”

Healer Braithwaite wrote something down before lowering her quill and looking at him.

“You do not need to visit a Healer every year,” she said. “You will only need a new visit if you start showing aggression or your health rapidly deteriorates. Otherwise, you’re good to continue taking the same amount of suppressants and have one rut each year. It has seemed to work for you for over fifteen years now, so there shouldn’t be any issues.”

Remus nodded.

“I will send a memo about this visit to the Werewolf Registry,” Healer Braithwaite said. “It’s important they are updated about any health concerns you might have. Or in this case, the health concerns you do not have. But I’m sure you were already aware of the sharing of information between the hospital and the Werewolf Registry.”

Remus had not been aware of it, but he nodded anyway. It made sense, when he thought about it; the Werewolf Registry was aware of everything else concerning him, so why not his health information.

“Right, then,” Healer Braithwaite said. “We can end this appointment, unless you had something else you wanted to discuss?”

“No, that was everything.”

“Good.”

Healer Braithwaite didn’t get up, merely looked at Remus expectantly, and Remus stood up, feeling clumsy under her gaze.

“Thank you,” he said and showed himself out.

He stopped at the reception to put on his jacket. He swallowed. There was a thrumming of anxiety below his sternum, but he wasn’t sure why.

He wished he didn’t need to go to work.

He was going to see James after work, which was something nice to look forward to, but it also made him nervous. He hadn’t seen James since his rut because he had needed a couple of days to recharge after it—mostly because it had been such an intensely intimate social situation, and after the rut had left his system, he had needed to come to terms with the things he had said and done. James had seemed quite pleased with everything, but Remus wasn’t sure how to feel.

At least he hadn’t been violent.

Remus couldn’t get over the embarrassment of having built James a nest. He knew James didn’t need one because he was an alpha, and he couldn’t understand why his instincts had told him to build one, anyway. James had been kind to take it in his stride and not say anything bad about it.

Although, based on his scent, James hadn’t thought anything bad about it. Remus couldn’t entirely trust what he had learned from James’s scent because it had been the first time he had actually smelled James, properly smelled him, so he wasn’t sure how to read his scent. He

did, however, think he would have noticed something if James had been secretly laughing at him.

Remus sighed and stepped outside. James had smelled so good. Remus hadn't known what he had been missing, and he didn't understand how he was supposed to go back to not smelling James. The sense of calm James's scent had caused was unbelievable, and he needed to ask James to scent his pillow for him when he came over later. He might not be able to smell the intricacies of it, but he would still smell his mate.

Something else that embarrassed Remus was how he had fucked James. His cheeks heated as he thought about it, how he had completely lost control and taken, taken, only taken what he needed, and he hadn't given any thought to what James wanted or needed. James hadn't even got to come once before he'd had a breakdown—another embarrassing thing. He had cried while being knotted to James, and he didn't know how he could ever look James in the eye after everything.

And knowing James, he wouldn't say anything about it. He would smile when he saw Remus, and he wouldn't bring any of the embarrassing stuff up.

That didn't stop Remus from being embarrassed, and by the time he got off work, he had worked himself into a nervous wreck. His embarrassment only grew when he got home and found James already waiting by his doorstep.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said.

"You're not late," James said. "I was early. I couldn't wait to see you."

James smiled brightly, and Remus couldn't understand how he could say things like that and not combust on the spot. Remus let them in and put the kettle on. James sat down on the sofa, looking right at home.

"How was your day?" he asked.

Remus shrugged. "Okay."

Remus stood by the stove, waiting for the kettle to boil. He could feel James's tension, and he couldn't help wishing he could also smell it.

"How was the Healer's appointment?" James finally asked.

Remus bit his lip and watched the kettle more closely, hoping it would interrupt them. It didn't.

"Remus?"

"I shouldn't change anything. I'm taking the right amount of suppressants and having the right number of ruts per year."

James said nothing. Remus couldn't look at him.

“Is that what they said?” James asked after a moment. “Did they check your hormones? And what about your sense of smell?”

The kettle finally boiled, and Remus busied himself with the tea. Unfortunately, it could only occupy him for so long before he no longer had an excuse not to talk to James.

“Well?” James asked once Remus had sat down next to him, a teacup in his hand. “What did they say about your sense of smell?”

Remus sipped his tea, burning his mouth on it. He cleared his throat.

“It’s a small price to pay for other people’s safety,” he finally said. “The suppressants are meant to keep me from showing aggression.”

He sipped his tea again, although it was still just as hot. James was quiet, his teacup forgotten in his hands. Or maybe not forgotten—maybe he was smarter than Remus and was waiting for it to cool down.

“It’s a small price to pay?” James eventually said. “Is that what they told you or are those your own words?”

Remus shrugged. He stroked the side of his cup with his finger.

“Did they check your hormone levels?” James asked.

“No.”

James leaned over to place his teacup on Remus’s dresser before turning properly towards him.

“They didn’t check your hormone levels?” he asked. “Even after you told them you’re having side effects?”

“It’s not dangerous.”

“How would you know that if they didn’t examine you? Did anything happen other than a discussion?”

“Nothing else needed to happen.”

James sighed and leaned heavily onto the sofa.

“They told you it’s okay?” he asked. “That it doesn’t matter if you’ve lost your sense of smell?”

“The suppressants are an important factor in keeping me in check.”

“Do you even hear what you’re saying? Keeping you in check? Remus, I just spent two days with you while you were off your suppressants. Without the suppressants, you become very

caring. You made sure I was happy and comfortable the whole time. Where was the aggression you're so worried about?"

Remus blushed. He couldn't possibly say it out loud.

"It's something that embarrasses you?" James asked.

Now that Remus knew how clearly it was possible to smell someone's emotions, he was even more mortified about every time he'd experienced strong emotions around James. James had known every time.

And it was a tad unfair Remus couldn't smell James's emotions.

"Do you think you were aggressive when you fucked me?" James asked. "Because let me tell you, Remus, you were not. That was normal alpha behaviour during a rut. I sometimes get a bit aggressive during my rut. I know what it looks like."

Remus only stared at his tea.

"Did the Healer talk to you like to a human being or a werewolf?" James asked. "There's no way they would have told you it's all okay if it wasn't just another bullshit reason to treat you like rubbish."

"But I am a werewolf. That's just who I am."

"I'm not trying to argue that. I know that. But you're also much more than a werewolf. You're a person who deserves better."

Remus shook his head, then hoped James hadn't been looking at him. He didn't want to get into an argument about his humanity. He didn't want to get into an argument of any kind, but least of all about him, his inherent qualities and the way the world viewed him.

"I can't believe they wouldn't properly treat you," James said. "Let me come with you for an appointment. I want to make sure they check that you're healthy."

"No."

"Remus—"

"No."

James huffed, but didn't argue further. Remus didn't know what to do, so he sipped his tea. James didn't reach for his own, his cup sitting on the dresser untouched. They were quiet for a long time.

"Why?" James then asked. "Why do you not want to make another appointment and take me with you?"

Remus frowned at his tea.

“Remus?”

“It won’t change anything. They’ll only think I’m being difficult, and that will make my life more difficult. Please, just leave it be.”

Remus finished his lukewarm tea. James was watching him.

Remus didn’t understand why James was so adamant about fighting his battles for him when he clearly didn’t know which battles were worth fighting for. He didn’t understand what it was like to be a werewolf, and it seemed that he refused to understand when Remus tried to explain it to him.

Maybe he would understand in time.

Maybe he would never give up, and Remus would have to argue with him about the way society treated him for the rest of their time together. Would it bring tension into their relationship? Would they always have that simmering disagreement between them?

Did Remus want to live like that?

But what choice did he have?

“What if it wasn’t an official Healer visit?” James asked. “What if no one would find out you saw a Healer? Would you go then?”

“What’s the point?”

“The point is to make sure you’re actually healthy. I’m really worried about your sense of smell.”

Remus stood up and took his teacup to the sink, gently placing it there. He could feel James’s eyes on him.

“What does it matter what I would do?” he asked. “There’s no way for me to visit a Healer without it being official.”

“Kingsley used to work as a Healer before he went to work for the Ministry.”

“Oh... What does he do for the Ministry?”

“Foreign affairs. But that’s not important. The important bit is that he’s a fully qualified Healer, and I have no doubt he would check your hormone levels for you if I asked.”

Remus worried his lip.

“Please?” James asked, looking at Remus imploringly. “I just want to know that my mate is okay.”

Remus found it impossible to say no.

James escorted Remus to Sirius and Kingsley's house, which was good because if Remus had been on his own, he would have turned around before he had even made it to the Floo. He couldn't believe he had said yes to James's suggestion. He would have James's best friend's mate examine him. What about patient confidentiality? Would Kingsley tell Sirius and James everything?

"We're here!" James called into the house.

Kingsley walked into the room shortly after with a smile on his face.

"Good to see you again, Remus," he said before turning to James. "Nice to see you too, I guess."

James laughed. He nudged Remus forward.

"I'll be waiting in the lounge," he said. "Is Sirius home?"

"He should be any minute now."

James waved his hand and walked out of the room. Kingsley turned to Remus, still smiling.

"Let's go in the study," he said.

Remus followed Kingsley into a study that had a grand desk and an entire wall of bookshelves in it. The floor was covered by a plush carpet. Remus was so nervous he was certain he was about to develop a nervous habit, such as biting his fingernails.

"Take a seat," Kingsley said, pointing to a comfortable-looking armchair. "Let's talk first."

Kingsley sat down on the desk chair, and Remus sank into the armchair, vaguely aware of how comfortable it was to sit in.

"I need you to know," Kingsley said, "that right now, I'm acting as your Healer. Everything that happens in this room stays within these walls, and it will not affect the way I think about you when we interact outside of a Healer-patient situation."

Remus nodded.

"I will not repeat anything you tell me," Kingsley said. "I will not discuss your health with anyone else without your permission. Does that sound okay?"

Remus nodded again. Kingsley looked kind.

"All right," Kingsley said. "James told me that before your appointment this week, you hadn't seen a Healer in well over a decade. Is that right?"

Remus nodded.

"And he said the Healer didn't examine you properly during your appointment," Kingsley said. "What exactly happened during the appointment?"

Remus had to open and close his mouth a few times before he could make a sound.

“She talked to me,” he said.

“And that was it?”

Remus nodded.

“What did you discuss?”

“She... she said I’ve been doing everything as I’m supposed to. And I don’t need to see a Healer unless my health gets worse.”

“What exactly have you been doing as you’re supposed to?”

Remus looked away. He looked at the books instead. He suddenly didn’t want to be there at all, but he couldn’t leave before Kingsley had given him an opinion, or James would be unhappy. Kingsley didn’t break the silence. Remus glanced at him and found him watching him patiently, the corners of his mouth upturned.

“I only have one rut per year,” Remus said, voice unsteady. “She said that’s what I should be doing.”

“Did she say why?”

“So... so that the suppressants work better.”

“What did she mean by that?”

Remus turned to look at his knees. The denim over them was worn out, and he would need to buy a new pair of jeans soon.

“It keeps the aggression away,” Remus said.

“And are you aggressive when you’re off your suppressants?”

“I could be.”

“But are you?”

Remus bit his lip and shook his head. Kingsley nodded.

“You have been using your suppressants this way for how long?”

“Since I was thirteen.”

“And have there been any side effects?”

Remus glanced at Kingsley, who still looked kind. Remus didn’t understand why Kingsley was acting so differently from the other Healers. Granted, Remus hadn’t seen very many Healers in his life. Maybe he had simply had bad luck. Or maybe the Healers working at St

Mungo's were told to treat werewolves a certain way. But Kingsley would have been told the same thing while he worked at St Mungo's.

Or did the Healers only find out how they should treat werewolves when they had a werewolf as a patient?

"I can't smell people very well," Remus said.

"How big a difference would you say there is between what you can smell while on suppressants and while you're off suppressants?"

"Big... I can't tell what James is feeling. I didn't... I didn't even know it was a possibility."

"That's a big side effect, I would say. Do you think it affects the quality of your life?"

Remus wasn't sure what to say. He had never thought there was anything wrong with his quality of life, so not smelling people hadn't been a big issue. However, now that he knew the difference between smelling and not smelling James, he yearned to smell him again. He just didn't think it was something that affected his quality of life; it was simply something he might have preferred was different.

"I wish I could smell him," he said quietly.

Much to his humiliation, he teared up as he thought about not being able to smell James. He blinked furiously, unwilling to let Kingsley see him break down.

"The ability to smell your loved ones is important to your well-being, I think," Kingsley said. "Have you noticed anything else?"

Remus shook his head.

"All right." Kingsley looked thoughtful. "My suggestion is that we check your hormone levels. Specifically, the so-called alpha hormone. That's the hormone the suppressants affect in alphas, so I think that would be what's causing your inability to smell people."

Remus nodded hesitantly.

"Does that sound okay?" Kingsley asked.

Remus nodded. Kingsley waited for a moment longer, but when Remus said nothing else, he took out his wand.

Checking the hormone levels ended up being a simple spell that gave the results on a piece of parchment. Kingsley gave them some thought before turning to Remus again.

"Your hormone levels are significantly lower than they should be," he said. "I think that's causing the issue with your sense of smell."

Remus didn't know what to say, so he nodded.

“Only having one rut per year is dangerous,” Kingsley said gently. “When you go a long time without taking a break with your suppressants, they will start affecting the overall balance of your hormones. Studies have shown that three to four breaks from the suppressants each year keep your hormone levels in balance. I’m surprised you’ve had no other issues.”

Remus could only stare. Why hadn’t the other Healers told him so?

“But I’m a werewolf,” he said.

“You might be a werewolf, but you still inhabit a human body.”

Kingsley’s smile was gentle, and Remus didn’t know what to say. Kingsley was right; the only time he didn’t inhabit a human body was during the full moon. But didn’t lycanthropy cause physical differences? He wasn’t aware of them, but there must have been something.

“What is the dosage you take?” Kingsley asked.

“Fifteen millilitres of strength two potion.”

“That’s a high dosage,” Kingsley sighed in thought. “My recommendation is that you half the dosage for the next three months, then have a rut. After the rut, I could check your hormone levels again, and then you can either continue with the lower dosage or switch back to the higher one. But in either case, you would then continue to have four ruts per year.”

Remus didn’t think it was a good idea. He knew no one kept count of how much and which type of suppressant he took, so he could easily switch, but what if it made him aggressive? What if he started attacking people? What if he became the caricature of a werewolf he had always tried not to be?

“Are you worried about becoming aggressive?” Kingsley asked. “I understood that’s a big worry you have.”

Remus nodded.

“You will not be off suppressants,” Kingsley said. “Even if you were naturally aggressive, you would still be on suppressants, and the dosage would still be high enough to keep any possible aggression at bay. I overheard some of what James told Sirius about your rut, and I didn’t hear anything that could be considered aggressive, quite on the contrary. Isn’t that correct?”

Remus hesitated, but then nodded.

“If you lowered your dosage and suddenly started developing aggression,” Kingsley said, “you could simply start taking the higher dosage again. No harm done.”

Remus still didn’t think it was a good idea, but he was also enticed by the thought of being able to smell James again.

“How quickly would I start smelling James again?” he blurted out.

“It’s hard to say before seeing how your hormone levels develop during these first few months, but if you’re lucky, you will start smelling him again within the first month.”

Was it selfish of Remus to lower his dosage and put other people at risk just because he wanted to smell his mate? And it wasn’t as if he couldn’t smell James at all—no, he simply missed the intricacies of his scent, the way it became richer, as if it was usually murky water and had suddenly cleared.

“I can’t force you,” Kingsley said. “I can only give you my recommendation as a Healer, and I really think you should rectify things before they get worse. I have no doubt your condition will eventually worsen.”

Remus should have said no, but he nodded.

“I’ll try it out,” he said.

“That’s great. I’m sure it will be good for you.”

Remus nodded.

“You can write to me if you have any questions or worries,” Kingsley said. “And let me know when you’ve had a rut. Or James will let me know, however you wish. I just want you to know that I don’t mind acting as your Healer, and even though work is sometimes busy, I’ll find time for you.”

Remus nodded. He knew something would have to go significantly wrong before he would contact Kingsley—or more likely, ask James to contact him—but he found it nice that Kingsley took the time to reassure him.

The moment Remus stepped into the lounge, James sprung up, completely ignoring Sirius, who gave up trying to talk to him.

“Are you okay?” James asked.

Remus glanced at Sirius, who turned to look away before getting up.

“I’ll get dinner started,” he said.

James waited until Sirius was out of the room before turning to Remus again. Kingsley had walked Remus to the lounge, but he had left as well.

“Is everything okay?” James asked.

“I’m fine.”

James frowned.

“I—I’m lowering my dosage.”

“The dosage of your suppressants? So there *was* something wrong.”

Remus shrugged. James looked at him for a moment before pulling him into a hug.

“Are you glad you came to see Kingsley?” James asked.

“I guess so.”

James stepped back, his hands on Remus’s shoulders and a smile on his face.

“Then I’m glad I nagged you into coming,” he said. “He was nice, wasn’t he? Hopefully different from the Healer you went to see on Wednesday.”

“Very different.”

James grinned and pulled Remus into a quick hug before releasing him.

“Was it an issue with your hormones?” he asked.

Remus nodded.

“But nothing serious?”

“Nothing serious. He thinks—he thinks it’ll fix itself in a couple of months.”

“That’s good. I’m glad you can still fix it so easily.”

James reached out to stroke Remus’s cheek with gentle fingers.

“I’m so relieved,” he said. “I worried there would be irreversible damage.”

Before Remus could say anything, Sirius appeared in the doorway.

“James,” he said. “What time was Harry coming over again?”

James looked at the clock.

“Oh, he should be here soon,” he said. Then he turned to Remus. “Do you want me to take you back home? You’ll have to leave if you’re not ready to meet Harry yet, he’s coming over for dinner.”

“I should go.”

“All right. Should I go with you?”

“Shouldn’t you be here when Harry gets here?”

James waved his hand and started steering Remus towards the hall.

“Sirius and Kingsley will be here to take care of him,” he said. “He’s old enough to manage without his dad for a while.”

Remus nodded and got dressed in his jacket. Sirius was hovering next to them, and Remus forced himself to turn to him and smile.

“Will you thank Kingsley for seeing me?” he said. “I’m grateful he took the time to do so.”

“It was nothing,” Sirius said. “But I’ll tell him. I guess I’ll see you when they come to inspect the cellar, at the latest.”

Remus nodded.

“Oh, that was the Floo,” Sirius said and turned away before Remus could feel awkward about saying goodbye.

Remus hurried out, and James followed.

“You don’t actually need to take me home,” Remus said.

“But I want to.”

Remus didn’t argue. He felt guilty about it, but he liked that James wanted to go with him. He liked that James wanted to spend time with him and solve his issues, and he worried it would twist their relationship into something it wasn’t supposed to be, a misshapen circle where everything good flowed towards Remus and nothing towards James.

And he knew he couldn’t avoid Harry forever. He would have to meet him at some point, and what if Harry hated him? James would choose his son over his mate.

James took Remus’s hand in his and gave it a squeeze. Remus glanced at him.

For a while longer, he would allow himself to enjoy. He would worry once he was alone.

Chapter End Notes

I only have one more finished chapter left, although I just recently resolved an issue I was having with ch19, so I will hopefully finish it at some point soon. Unfortunately, I've been signing up for fests again so this fic will not be my priority while I'm working on them, but I hope I can still find the time to write this. Anyway, as usual, I don't know how long it will take me to edit the next chapter.

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Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

James was glad he was currently unemployed because it meant he could be there for the Ministry inspection of Sirius and Kingsley's cellar. He had wanted to go to the Werewolf Registry with Remus to meet the employee who would carry out the inspection, but Remus had told him no. James understood why, but he didn't need to like it.

"He's a grown-up, Jim," Sirius had said once he'd had enough of James's brooding. "You can't coddle him."

James was twirling his wand in his fingers because he had nothing else to do, and nearly dropped it when the doorbell rang. He hurried to the hall, almost bouncing as he waited for Sirius to open the door. Sirius laughed at him and opened the door with a smile on his face.

James watched the Ministry employee's face go through several emotions as he looked at Sirius, clearly recognising him.

"Good afternoon," Sirius said, offering his hand to the poor man. "I'm Sirius Black."

The Ministry employee stared at the hand in surprise before taking it and giving it a shake.

"Good afternoon, Mr Black," he said. "I'm Daniel Box from the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, Beast Division. I'm here to inspect the cellar this werewolf is hoping to spend the full moon in."

"We were expecting you."

Box turned to look at James, who strode forward to shake his hand.

"James Potter. I'm Remus's mate."

Box looked surprised, although James didn't understand why. Had he recognised James's name? Had he not expected the werewolf to have a mate? Whatever the reason, James squeezed his hand a tad harder than was necessary.

"Shall I show you to the cellar?" Sirius asked.

It was obvious from Box's behaviour that he didn't want to turn his back to Remus, which James found ridiculous. Box was a big man, most likely an alpha, and James didn't doubt he would be easily able to overpower Remus if Remus happened to be a confrontational person. James watched Remus next to both Sirius and Box, nearly half a head shorter than either of them, and thought about how sexy it was that Remus with his smaller stature could sometimes become so confident and so undeniably alpha. He wanted Remus to push him around and hold him down as he fucked him.

“Here we are,” Sirius said, gesturing towards the stairs that led to the cellar.

Sirius stood back, and after a moment’s hesitation, Remus led Box down the stairs. Box took his wand out, and James had a feeling it wasn’t only because he was about to inspect the spells Remus had put in place.

“Let’s see, then,” Box said and raised his wand. “How long have these spells been in place?”

“Twelve days,” Remus said.

“And who put them up?”

“James and Sirius. They are former Aurors, so they are qualified.”

There was no trace of hesitation in Remus’s voice, and James turned to look at Sirius, who had raised his brows. Box turned to look at them.

“Is that true?” he asked.

“Yes,” James said immediately. “Remus told us which spells we needed to make the cellar safe.”

“And you agreed with... him?”

“Yes.”

Box nodded and returned to his inspection. James looked at Remus, who stood at the door, revealing nothing about how he felt. James suspected he was using the technique he had to keep his emotions at bay.

Before Remus had left, he had told James and Sirius to please corroborate whatever he told the Ministry employee, but James hadn’t realised he was going to lie. Why hadn’t he said so beforehand? Had James simply not understood that was what he had meant?

In hindsight, he probably should have realised.

They are qualified, Remus had said. Were the full moon accommodations of a werewolf supposed to be protected by people who were qualified to do so? What did it mean to be qualified? If Remus weren’t a werewolf, would he be qualified because he had an O in his Defence N.E.W.T, or would he be expected to have formal training?

Lyll had said Remus had been taking care of protecting the shed since he knew how. Did the Ministry think it had been Lyll doing the spell work? Had they even needed to inspect the shed after the first inspection? Probably. James couldn’t imagine the Beast Division allowing the shed to remain uninspected for well over two decades.

“How long was there between the first application of the spells and the second?” Box asked, looking at James.

“Six days,” Remus said.

James nodded. Box returned to his task. James glanced at Sirius, who was casually leaning against the wall with his arms crossed.

Box went through all the protective spells twice before he looked happy with them. He checked the door three more times.

“It’s the one weak spot in this cellar,” he said. “We want to be absolutely certain it will hold.”

Once Box was satisfied the protections would hold, he put his wand away.

“Excellent work, Mr Potter, Mr Black,” he said. “I couldn’t find any weak spots, and the spells have been well rooted into the stone, which is sometimes difficult to achieve.”

“Thank you,” Sirius said with a charming smile.

It was good because James had already forgotten he was supposed to pretend he was the one who had protected the cellar and not Remus.

“I have no doubts about the safety of this cellar,” Box said. “The werewolf will not be able to get out, so you’ll be perfectly safe.”

James didn’t like the implication that Remus’s safety didn’t matter, but thought it better to keep his mouth shut. Remus looked stoic and headed up the stairs when Box made it apparent he was still unwilling to turn his back to him. Sirius clapped his shoulder as he went past, and Remus’s stance faltered before he could catch himself.

“I shouldn’t be surprised by the level of expertise those protections show,” Box said to James. “Two Aurors working on it together are bound to produce quality.”

“Yes.”

James wanted to scream. He had noticed Remus’s shoulders stiffening as Box spoke, and James bit his cheek so as not to say something stupid.

It was unfair that Remus wasn’t allowed to do anything meaningful, such as protecting his own full moon accommodations.

Although rather than protecting the cellar, he was protecting the rest of the house, wasn’t he? What mattered was the safety of the people who might be around, not the safety of the werewolf. Lyall had told James to expect blood. Was there no way to avoid that?

“Oh, hello, Daniel,” came Kingsley’s voice.

James raised his head to find Kingsley in the doorway, having just come back from work.

“Kingsley,” Box said. “I wasn’t expecting to see you.”

“Sirius is my mate.”

“Oh. Oh, I see.”

Box turned to look at Sirius, who chose that moment to walk up to Kingsley and kiss him.

“Were you here to inspect the cellar?” Kingsley asked, patting Sirius’s cheek affectionately, although his attention was back on Box.

“Yes. Mr Black has done an excellent job with it.”

James saw Remus stop breathing. They hadn’t expected Kingsley to be home before the Ministry inspector had left, so no one had told him he should lie. Kingsley, however, merely smiled.

“He’s very capable,” he said. “He was already good before he started his Auror training, but I’m sure the training helped him hone his skills.”

Box was nodding eagerly.

“Well,” Kingsley said. “I’ll see you around. Maybe we should have lunch one day.”

“That would be nice.”

Once Box was out the door, Kingsley turned to Remus.

“Everything was in order, then?” he asked.

“Yes. He was very pleased.”

“Good. Do you want to stay for dinner?”

“Oh. I still need to get back to work.”

“What a pity. You’re good company.”

Remus looked flustered and turned to James.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” James said and pulled him into a hug. “Have a good day at work.”

While James and Remus were saying goodbye, Kingsley pulled Sirius aside.

“You don’t need to be so territorial,” James heard him say.

“I’m sorry. He was such a prick that I couldn’t help it.”

Kingsley chuckled, and James returned his focus to Remus, who was just stepping out.

“See you,” James said.

Remus gave him a cute little wave before Apparating away.

When James turned around, Sirius had gone, and Kingsley was picking up his briefcase.

“Will you have time to teach me sometime this week?” James asked.

“On the weekend, yes.” Kingsley straightened up. “I don’t think you’re going to learn it in time. That spell is really complex and took me a couple of years to get comfortable with. I don’t want to be a defeatist, but I’ve already made sure I will be home the morning after the full moon.”

James sighed and nodded.

“Have you told Remus yet?” Kingsley asked.

“No... I know I should, but I keep thinking maybe I’ll still learn it. I will tell him.”

Kingsley nodded, then looked towards the kitchen, where Sirius was clattering with pots.

“I wanted to say thank you,” Kingsley said quietly. “For making Sirius quit his job. I never realised how miserable it was making him.”

“Has it been obvious, then?”

“Yes. He’s drinking less now.”

“Oh. That’s good. Although I wasn’t aware he had a drinking problem.”

“It wasn’t alarmingly bad.” Kingsley sighed. “But he’s drinking less now, which makes me feel bad for not having realised something might be wrong.”

“Don’t feel bad about it. I wasn’t aware of it either.”

“But you’re not his mate.”

“I might as well be.”

Kingsley laughed. James grinned.

“At first, I thought you were,” Kingsley said.

“Really? I didn’t know that.”

“You two seemed so codependent I thought you were very much headed to a mating.”

James snorted.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “Sirius is so not my type.”

“I heard that,” Sirius yelled from the kitchen.

“Good. It’s about time you found out the truth.”

“How could you, Jim? After all these years, you go and break my heart.”

Kingsley chuckled.

“Don’t worry, Kingsley,” Sirius said. “I don’t go for icky alphas. I only like hot omegas.”

“That’s a relief to hear,” Kingsley said with a laugh.

“I’m not an icky alpha,” James said. “I’m a sexy alpha.”

“Sure, keep telling yourself that,” Sirius said.

Something clattered onto the floor.

“Don’t break the kitchen,” Kingsley said and walked to the doorway to look in. “What are you making?”

“Just some pasta,” Sirius said.

“Just some pasta, he says. As if your cooking isn’t just the best.”

Sirius grinned at Kingsley as James stepped up to him.

“Good alpha,” Kingsley said and blew Sirius a kiss.

Sirius giggled, and James fondly watched the exchange.

“I’ll take this”—Kingsley raised his briefcase—“to the study. James, will you come with me? I wanted to ask you something.”

James nodded. Sirius had his head in a cupboard. Kingsley headed off, and James followed, wondering what Kingsley might want to talk about. Did he have something else to say about Sirius? James felt bad for never noticing how much Sirius had hated being an Auror and how much it had affected his mood. It felt like something he should have noticed after they started training, but all signs pointing towards it had been buried under all the other turmoil of that period in their lives, he supposed.

“I didn’t think to ask him myself,” Kingsley said as he placed his briefcase on the desk chair, “but has Remus ever talked to you about the Wolfsbane Potion?”

“What’s Wolfsbane Potion?”

“That’s a no, then. It’s a potion that allows the werewolf to keep their human mind during the transformation. That allows them control, which leads to fewer injuries both for themselves and for others.”

“That—that sounds amazing. Why isn’t Remus taking it?”

“It’s expensive.”

James’s heart sank. Remus wasn’t taking the potion because he couldn’t afford it, there was no doubt about that, and he was certain Remus wouldn’t want him to buy the potion for him even if it was his idea and he offered. He would have to try. If there was something that could make Remus’s life easier, James would have to try to make him accept help.

“I was thinking you could present him with the idea of Wolfsbane,” Kingsley said. “It wouldn’t solve all his health issues, but it would minimise the damage.”

“Yes, I was just thinking I’ll have to figure out a way to make him allow me to buy it for him.”

“It would be a big help for him.”

James nodded, biting his lip in thought.

“That was all I had to ask,” Kingsley said. “Let’s go and help Sirius.”

“You mean distract him?”

Kingsley laughed. James followed him out of the study and into the kitchen, and decided to let the idea of Wolfsbane Potion simmer; maybe it would yield a plan.

Remus’s breath hitched when James took the tip of his cock in his mouth. His hands fisted in the sheets, and James wanted one of them in his hair. He suckled the tip and wondered if he should ask, but he didn’t want to take Remus’s cock out of his mouth now that he had finally got it in. Maybe if he did a good enough job, Remus would instinctually want to hold his hair.

He slid down Remus’s length, loving the way it fitted in his mouth, and Remus squirmed when he slurped his way up. He pulled off with a pop and reached for one of Remus’s hands.

“Will you hold me by the hair?” he asked.

Remus opened his eyes and looked at him with a small frown, but then let go of the sheets to sink his fingers into James’s hair instead. James hummed contentedly.

“It’s okay if you pull,” he said. “It’s more than okay.”

“Oh.”

Remus’s face did something complicated. James waited for a moment, but when Remus said nothing else, he lowered his mouth to his cock again.

At first, Remus cradled James’s head, clearly trying his hardest not to pull, but as James continued sucking and licking, stroking with his hand what his mouth couldn’t reach, Remus’s fingers tangled with his hair until he tugged on it, his head thrown back in a moan. James used every trick he knew, Remus’s moans growing in volume, and Remus finally pulled. James moaned, causing Remus to arch his back and try to push up into his mouth, but James held him down by his hips.

“James—James,” Remus panted. “I’m going to come. I’m going to—”

James didn’t let up, sucking Remus with purpose, and Remus soon reached his peak, filling James’s mouth, and James swallowed, sucking him dry.

James licked Remus's cock clean before pulling back. Remus's hand was still in his hair, but he let it drop onto the bed as James moved, and James looked at him. His face was flushed, and his eyes shone with contentment, and his scent was so pleased James could have come just from smelling it.

Remus looked at him, panting.

"Should I—?" he asked.

"If you could. I'm very close already. Just—"

James settled on the bed next to Remus and guided his hand under his robes and into his pants. Remus's fingers wrapped around his cock, and it truly didn't take more than a few strokes before James came, his head turned towards Remus's neck to better smell him.

"That was perfect," James muttered, leaning into Remus.

Remus hesitated, but then wiped his hand on the sheets before pulling James closer. They lay there, both coming down, and James would have happily remained there for the rest of the day, but as his head cleared up, he was reminded of what he needed to talk to Remus about.

Remus's eyes were closed, but his scent wasn't calm enough for him to be asleep.

"Harry has been asking about you," James said. "He wants to meet you."

Remus stiffened.

"I know you're not ready yet," James said. "I just thought you should know."

Remus was quiet for a long time before saying, "I know I'll have to meet him. But..."

James waited. Remus had opened his eyes and was staring at the ceiling, his scent nervous.

"I need you to..." Remus said, hesitating for a long time. "I can't meet him before I know for certain that you... It's better for him not to meet me before you're sure."

"About what?"

"That you still want to be with me."

James was baffled by what Remus was thinking. He understood what Remus was saying, and he agreed, but he didn't understand what made Remus think he was suddenly going to change his mind.

"What would make me not want to be with you?" he asked.

Remus bit his lip, and his scent was a restless wave crashing over them.

"The full moon," he said quietly.

"But I've already seen you after a full moon."

Remus shook his head.

“You haven’t seen me right after it,” he said. “Or before it. You haven’t seen—you don’t know what it’s like.”

“But I will know. It’s not much longer before the next full moon. And then I will have seen you both before and after.”

The idea didn’t seem to comfort Remus in the least, and James could understand why it would be hard for him to believe James wouldn’t leave him only because he needed help around the full moon.

Although James had to admit he was getting a bit nervous himself. He had no idea what it was like, and he was about to find out, and there was a part of him that worried it was going to be so bad he would find it hard to stay with Remus. He knew it was unlikely to happen, but he couldn’t help worrying.

“Speaking of the full moon,” he said. “I have a confession to make.”

Remus’s scent grew more nervous.

“I’m sorry,” James said. “I’m really sorry, but I lied when I told your dad I’m good with healing magic. I know *Episkey*, and I can use it, but that’s the extent of it.”

Remus’s scent was going sour.

“I’ve been practising with Kingsley,” James said. “He’s been a big help, but I still have too much to learn. I won’t learn it on time. I’m sorry.”

Remus was breathing superficially.

“However,” James said, “I have asked Kingsley if he could be there to heal you, and he has said yes. He wouldn’t mind it at all. Please, will you let him help? I know I should have told you earlier—Merlin, I know I shouldn’t have lied to your dad in the first place, and I feel terrible about it. I really thought I could learn before the full moon.”

Remus said nothing. He didn’t move. He was staring towards the ceiling, but James didn’t think he could actually see anything.

“I’m sorry,” James said. “But wouldn’t it be good to have a competent Healer to heal you in the morning, anyway? So, in a way, it’s good, right?”

Remus’s lips trembled. His scent was quickly turning salty, and James knew he was about to cry.

“I’m so sorry,” James said. “I’m such an idiot. I try to be a good mate, but then I do stupid shit like this.”

Remus’s breath hitched, and he closed his eyes. James leaned up on his elbow and stroked Remus’s chest.

“Please, talk to me,” he said. “What’s going through your head right now?”

Remus bit his lips together, and a single tear squeezed past his eyelids, sliding down his temple. James wiped it away.

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered.

There were more tears, and Remus gasped wetly. James wiped the tears away, but soon there were too many of them, so he stroked Remus’s cheek instead, hoping Remus could eventually forgive him.

Remus opened his mouth and said something through a sob, and James had no guesses as to what he had said.

“What?” he asked. “What did you say?”

Remus gasped and sobbed before taking a deep breath.

“Unsafe,” he then said. “It makes me feel unsafe.”

“I’m so sorry. I don’t want you to feel unsafe with me.”

James gently pulled him closer, cradling him in his arms.

“I can’t do it alone,” Remus sobbed against James’s chest. “I need help, and I… I depend on it, and it’s scary.”

James stroked his back. He had already known, but there had been a part of him that hadn’t realised how uncertain the change of his full moon accommodations must be for Remus.

“I want my dad,” Remus whispered.

James teared up as he held Remus closer to him.

He hadn’t realised. He hadn’t really realised how vulnerable Remus felt, about the full moon in general, but also about the change. Remus had always transformed in the same shed, hadn’t he, and now he was not only going to transform somewhere new, but he would no longer have his father to support him in the morning. He was relying on James, who might have been his mate, but they had only known each other for less than two months, so Remus couldn’t really know how reliable James was.

And James hadn’t been very reliable, had he, lying to Remus about how well he could take care of him. Kingsley was obviously the best choice of a person to help Remus in the morning after the full moon, but Remus had been expecting it to be James, and the way he had been orientating himself to the new situation was now suddenly different from what it was going to be in reality.

Not to mention, Remus had only met Kingsley a couple of times, and while he had allowed Kingsley to act as his Healer, it was far different for him to choose to go to him when he was

in full health than it was for him to be helpless after the full moon, relying on other people's help.

Deep down, Remus was still the same scared little boy James imagined he had been right after he had been bitten, and he needed his dad.

James squeezed his eyes shut and cursed Lyall Lupin for abandoning his son.

He swallowed and cleared his throat to make sure his voice was stable before asking, "Would you like for your dad to be there after the full moon? Would it make the change in routine easier for you?"

Remus was still for a long time before nodding.

"I'll write to him," James said. "I'll arrange it. You don't need to worry about it. That's something I can do for certain."

Although, his success depended on Lyall and what he would say. James thought it likely he had prepared to be available around the full moon, since he had offered the shed for Remus for one more full moon, and it would be cruel of him not to come when his son so obviously needed him.

Remus cried into James's chest for quite a while longer, and James held him through it. He might have been rubbish at healing magic, but he could at least comfort Remus.

Once Remus was calm, James cleared his throat.

"So," he said. "Will you let Kingsley help? Your dad can be there to make sure Kingsley is doing everything right."

Remus thought before nodding hesitantly.

"Good," James said. "That's good. I'll watch him, so I'll eventually learn how to heal you."

Remus sniffled, and James stroked his back.

"I did actually have another thing I wanted to talk to you about," James said.

Remus stiffened.

"It's nothing bad, I promise. Kingsley just brought something to my attention, and I wanted to ask your opinion of it. Are you—do you know about the Wolfsbane Potion?"

"No."

"Oh. Okay, well, it's a potion that—"

"No, I know what it is." Remus pulled away to look James in the eye. "I won't let you buy it for me."

“Why not? The money isn’t an issue for me.”

“I don’t want to be a charity case.”

“That’s not how I see it at all.”

Remus shook his head, and James could tell there was nothing he could say at that moment to make him change his mind.

“That’s not how I see it at all,” he repeated. “But okay. I won’t buy it for you if you don’t want me to, but could you at least give it some thought? You wouldn’t be so badly hurt after the full moon if you were on Wolfsbane.”

Remus looked at him defiantly, and he sighed.

“Just think about it, okay?” he asked.

Remus frowned, but then nodded.

“Thank you,” James said. “That’s all I can ask for.”

He would have to figure out a way to make Remus accept the potion. He was sure he could, eventually.

Chapter End Notes

We have now reached the end of what I have written. I've signed up for several fests again, so this fic won't be my priority for a while now, so it will probably take a few months at least before I'll be posting again. Thank you everyone who has been reading!

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Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus knocked on the door and waited. He looked around the well-maintained garden, which had clearly been recently worked in. The wind was bitter, and Remus tightened the scarf around his neck, wishing he could keep it on during the entire visit.

The door opened, and Kate's smiling face greeted him.

“Remus!” she said and pulled him into a warm hug. “It's been so long. Come in.”

Remus stepped inside, wondering about how he could smell Kate now. She smelled comfortable, as if he had known her scent for years. Maureen peeked into the hall from the kitchen and grinned.

“It's so good to see you,” she said. “How long has it been?”

Remus shrugged and took off his jacket, which Kate immediately took. After a moment's hesitation, he also removed his scarf. Kate gasped when she turned to him.

“A mating mark!” she said. “Oh, you've found a mate? Why haven't you said anything?”

Remus's face heated, and he ducked his head.

“We met at the Alpha Mating Registry,” he mumbled.

“The Alpha Mating Registry? Well, time sure flies, doesn't it? I didn't realise you were already at that age. Oh, I still think of you as the timid twenty-year-old you were when we first met.”

Remus smiled and glanced at her.

“I was twenty-one,” he said.

Kate laughed.

“Come on, now,” she said and took hold of Remus's arm. “Let's sit down and you can tell us all about them.”

Remus followed her into the small sitting room. Maureen followed them shortly, floating a tray of tea and biscuits before her. She glanced at Remus's mating mark before smiling at him more brightly than he could remember ever seeing her smile.

“So,” Kate said once they were all settled with cups of tea. “Tell us about your mate. When did you meet, exactly?”

“I'm just realising that you've never told us when your birthday is,” Maureen said.

“Oh... it was in March,” Remus said.

“In March?” Kate asked and frowned. “When did you visit the Registry, exactly? I was thinking probably late last year?”

“In March.”

Maureen and Kate glanced at each other, and Remus took a sip of his tea.

“It's mid-May,” Maureen said. “How on earth did you meet someone and already mate with them in two months?”

“It's been six weeks,” Remus muttered at his tea.

Maureen and Kate looked at each other again.

“And,” Maureen asked, “how did that happen?”

Remus told them the whole story, unwilling to look at them and find out what they thought exactly.

“Well,” Kate said. “It's a bit unconventional, but maybe he will turn out to be the right person for you.”

Maureen nodded. “Tell us about him.”

“Well...” Remus sipped his tea. “His name is James.”

Kate nodded and looked at Remus expectantly.

“Wait,” Maureen said. “James, as in James Potter, the Auror you asked about?”

Remus bit his lip and nodded. He was intently staring into his teacup.

“Oh dear,” Kate said.

“Don't take this the wrong way, love,” Maureen said, “but why on earth did you mate with an Auror?”

“I didn't know he was an Auror until after we'd already mated,” Remus said quietly.

Maureen and Kate looked at each other before they both turned to look at Remus. Kate's eyes were soft, nearly pitying, but Maureen had a frown on her face.

“Why didn't he tell you beforehand?” she asked. “Did he know you're a werewolf?”

“He knew. And he thought he had told me, and I actually thought that too. I just... figured I'd forgotten what he had said he did for work. It was so fast.”

“Too fast, if you ask me,” Maureen said.

“Why did you decide to stay with him?” Kate asked.

“I don’t have a choice, do I?” Remus asked.

“You always have a choice,” Maureen said. “If breaking up with him is going to cause issues with the Registry, we could help you find someone you can mate with temporarily. That would buy you time to find someone else.”

“But I like him,” Remus whispered.

His hands shook, and the tea in his cup rippled.

“Oh, love,” Maureen said.

She set her teacup on the table, took Remus’s cup to put it aside as well, and then took his shaking hand in hers.

“How has he been treating you?” Kate asked. “Is it safe for you to stay with him? Oh, and we heard the rumour he quit his job. Is that true?”

“He quit because I told him I can’t be with an Auror.”

“Well,” Kate said slowly and glanced at Maureen, “that's positive, at least.”

Maureen said nothing. Her hands were warm against Remus’s skin, and Remus suddenly wanted to cry.

“I think,” Kate said, “if he was willing to quit his job because of you, maybe it’s safe for you to stay with him. Don’t say anything, Maureen. We all know what you think.”

Maureen said nothing, but she gave Remus’s hand a squeeze.

“Has he told you anything about his job?” Kate asked.

“He said he specialised in a field where he doesn’t encounter werewolves,” Remus said. “And he only ever observed one werewolf interrogation while he was a trainee.”

“But you thought he might have been lying,” Maureen said. “Why?”

Remus shrugged.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t think he was purposefully hiding it from me, but I couldn’t be sure, and... he said he’s only been an Auror for two years, and he did tell me what he was doing before it, and I don’t think he would have made it up because it didn’t make him look better in my eyes and... I don’t know. I don’t have anyone to talk to, and I don’t know what I’m supposed to think, and he has everything while I have nothing, and now I’m growing more and more dependent on him, and it scares me.”

Remus swallowed. It was quiet for a moment, then Maureen pulled him into a hug, her warm scent surrounding him.

“What do you mean, you have no one to talk to?” she asked gently. “You have us. And what about your other friends?”

“I don't have any other friends,” Remus mumbled miserably.

Kate let out a distressed sound, and Maureen pulled Remus more tightly against her.

“Why haven't you said anything?” she asked. “We imagined you might have a busy social life, and that's why you seem to be keeping a distance. But you have no one else?”

“I don't want to bother you,” Remus said.

“It's not a bother,” Kate said, her voice thick. “You're not a bother at all.”

“You're allowed to take up space,” Maureen said. “You're allowed to exist and ask for the things you need. You are important, and you are enough just as you are.”

Remus squeezed his eyes shut in the hopes it would stop them from tearing up. Kate placed her hand on his shoulder. They sat there in silence for a long time, until the churning of emotions in Remus calmed down some.

“Do you think you're okay to talk now?” Maureen asked. “I have some questions I would like to ask you.”

Remus nodded, and Maureen released him, squeezing his shoulder.

“How do you not have any other friends?” she asked. “Didn't you make any in school or uni?”

“I wasn't allowed. And then when I could have, I no longer knew how.”

“What do you mean, you weren't allowed?” Kate asked.

“My parents told me not to make friends with anyone so that no one would accidentally find out about—about me.”

“But didn't you already have friends before you were bitten?”

“We moved.”

Maureen turned to look at Kate, who was frowning at Remus.

“Didn't any of your friends want to stay in touch?” Maureen asked. “How old were you?”

“I was four.”

“Four,” Kate gasped.

“And you’ve been alone ever since?” Maureen asked. “I’m so sorry, love. No one deserves to be isolated from other people.”

Remus wanted to argue because he must have deserved it, but if being a werewolf made him a monster and undeserving of affection, wouldn't it also apply to Maureen and Kate? But he didn't think they were monsters, or that they didn't deserve the relationships they had.

Why was it so hard for him to see himself as worthy of the same things?

“When you said you’re growing more dependent on James,” Maureen asked, “what did you mean?”

Remus sighed.

“Dad found a new mate and told her I died in the werewolf attack,” Remus said, “so I can’t use his shed to transform any longer.”

“Oh,” Kate said. “That’s not right.”

“And he won’t be there to fix me in the morning. It’s going to be James, and he’s organised somewhere for me to go this full moon, but because it’s at his friends’ house, that’s also dependent on him. What if he breaks up with me? What if—what if he can’t do it once he sees me in the morning? I’m going to have to go to the Ministry.”

“No,” Maureen said firmly. “Whatever you do, do *not* go to the Ministry.”

“She’s right,” Kate said. “But you don’t need to worry. If he chose to leave you, you could transform with us. We have friends who help us after full moons, and it would be absolutely no trouble to include you.”

Remus didn’t know what to say. He had never transformed with other werewolves. What if he was aggressive to other wolves? And he would hate to be a burden on people who didn’t even know him.

“Just something to think about,” Maureen said.

“You don’t have to worry about only having one person to lean on,” Kate said.

Maureen hummed in agreement. Remus didn’t know how to feel. He was thankful they had offered at all, but he wasn’t sure if they really meant for him to say yes.

“He also,” Remus said. “James said he’s going to buy a house, but I can’t contribute to that at all. Then I would be living in his house, and what if it doesn’t work out? What if he gets tired of me not being able to afford anything?”

“Isn’t he Fleamont Potter’s son?” Kate asked.

“I don’t know. I haven’t asked.”

“Is he a pure-blood? I don’t think he could be any other Potter than the Sneekeazy Potters.”

“He’s rich,” Maureen said. “He can afford to support you. Take all the money you can get, love.”

“But I’d feel guilty,” Remus said.

“Never feel guilty about taking money from rich people,” Maureen said.

Kate laughed. Remus chuckled.

“I agree with her,” Kate said. “But I also understand why you might feel awkward about it. In the end, you will be able to contribute the same amount of money you’re currently spending on supporting yourself, so would it help you to think that you’re still supporting yourself with that money?”

“He’ll want to buy me things I can’t afford,” Remus said. “He offered to buy me Wolfsbane Potion.”

“Take it,” Maureen said immediately. “Wolfsbane will make your life much easier. Take it.”

“I agree with her,” Kate said. “We don’t have personal experience, but from what we have heard, it has made a huge difference to the werewolves who have had a chance to use it. At least think about it.”

“You deserve good things, love,” Maureen said.

Remus looked away.

“Well,” Kate said and cleared her throat. “I wanted to ask you about this friend of his. The one who has offered you a place to transform. Are they also an Auror?”

“What’s their name?” Maureen asked.

“He—his name is Sirius,” Remus said.

“Sirius as in Sirius Black?” Maureen asked. “The other Auror you asked about?”

Remus nodded.

“Are all of James’s friends Aurors?” Maureen asked significantly.

“No,” Remus said. “Just Sirius. And he quit his job, too.”

Maureen and Kate shared a look.

“Well,” Kate said slowly. “It could be worse. From what I’ve heard, Black was reasonable.”

“If you can call an Auror reasonable,” Maureen muttered.

“Imagine if he were friends with Butterfield or what’s his name? Walker?” Kate said.

“I refuse to believe a person like Butterfield could have any friends,” Maureen said.

Remus snorted. He had personally never encountered Butterfield—which, according to his friends, was a very good thing because apparently, all the werewolves who crossed paths with him ended up with a criminal record. Remus had seen him from a distance a couple of times, and his friends had made him swear he would never reveal he was a werewolf if Butterfield asked. Remus always admitted he was a werewolf when he encountered Aurors because he didn't want to risk being found out, but he had enough sense not to do that with Butterfield. He would be in trouble in either case, so he might as well take the risk.

“Anyway,” Kate said, “is James good with healing charms, or how is he going to help you in the morning?”

Remus hesitated a tad too long, and Maureen's face darkened, and Kate squinted at him.

“Does he not have a plan?” Kate asked.

“You should stay with us,” Maureen said.

Remus sighed.

“Dad talked him through what I need in the morning,” he said. “But he—turns out he's actually not good at healing magic at all.”

“You're staying with us,” Maureen said.

“But he—Sirius's mate is a former Healer,” Remus said. “He—James said he'll be available.”

“A former Healer and a current...?” Maureen asked.

Remus smiled. “He's not an Auror.”

“That's something, at least,” Maureen muttered.

“And you're sure he will be available?” Kate asked. “And that he's trustworthy?”

“I think so,” Remus said. “He checked my hormone levels for me when the hospital wouldn't, and he was very nice about it.”

“Why did you need to have your hormone levels checked?” Kate asked.

“James thought there might be something wrong because I—I can't smell him properly when I'm on suppressants, and apparently the directions I got from a Healer about the use of suppressants isn't what alphas are usually told. So, he wanted me to get checked.”

“He wanted you to get checked,” Maureen said. “I'm a bit concerned about your wording of that, love.”

Remus shook his head.

“He’s treating you well, isn’t he?” Kate asked. “If he isn’t, you need to end it immediately. Don’t let yourself get any deeper into it. It will be harder to leave.”

Remus bristled at the idea that he wasn’t capable of taking care of himself. He knew they didn’t mean it like that because they were his friends and they were werewolves themselves, but he couldn’t help the sourness that spread over him.

“He’s treating me fine,” he said.

“I’m sorry I upset you,” Kate said. “But we want to make sure you’re in a relationship that makes you happy rather than oppresses you.”

“And he *is* an Auror,” Maureen said.

“He *was* an Auror,” Remus said. “He’s willing to change, and he genuinely thinks about what’s best for me.”

“But do you agree with him about what’s best for you?” Maureen asked. “Or is he doing things you don’t want because they’re *good for you*?”

Remus frowned.

“He’s the only person to ever have told me I’m using the suppressants wrong,” he said. “Why didn’t Dad say anything? Why did I use them for fifteen years without anyone telling me?”

Maureen opened her mouth, but Kate spoke before she could say anything.

“I think it sounds like he’s trying his best. Isn’t that all anyone can do?”

Maureen looked like she didn’t agree, but said nothing.

“Just keep in mind, Remus, that you can always come to us if anything changes,” Kate said. “We have your back.”

Remus nodded stiffly.

“Let’s talk about something else,” Kate said.

The conversation, thankfully, stayed away from James until it was time for Remus to leave.

“Remember that we’re here for you,” Kate said.

“If you need anything, we’ll help you,” Maureen said. “You don’t only depend on James.”

Remus nodded, trying to convince himself that they really meant it.

James came to visit Remus after work, stepping inside with a grin on his face and a spring in his step. He greeted Remus happily, but Remus found it hard to focus on anything but his scent. Ever since lowering the dosage of his suppressants, Remus had found it harder to resist

James; he got confirmation from the way he could no longer stop himself from pressing against him and sniffing his scent gland. Remus was mortified, but James seemed delighted.

Remus tried to back away, but James wrapped his arms around him to stop him.

“It’s okay,” James said. “You can allow instinctual behaviour. It doesn’t make you dangerous.”

Remus was even more mortified to find out that James had realised he was trying to stay in control of his instincts and that he did it because he worried it would lead to dangerous behaviour.

“But what if—”

“Remus. You’re not a violent person.”

Remus opened his mouth to protest, but before he could, James hurried to continue.

“And even if you were,” he said, “I could handle it. I don’t like reminding you, but I used to be an Auror. We were taught how to deal with violence.”

Remus didn’t know what to say, so he said nothing. James waited for a beat longer before loosening his hold. Remus didn’t pull away.

He stood still, breathing in James’s bewitching scent. His instincts were telling him to take because his mate was willing to give, and his hold of them was slipping as James’s scent surrounded him.

Remus raised a shaking hand and sank his fingers into James’s unruly hair. James leaned his head to the side to offer up his scent gland, and Remus pressed his nose into it and inhaled. James shivered, and Remus rubbed his cheek against his scent gland before biting it, causing James to moan, and Remus tightened his hold on his hair to pull his head aside. James gripped Remus’s shirt with one hand, while the other settled on his waist, warm and firm. Remus released his skin to press their scent glands together, rubbing them furiously as he pulled James against his body. James’s scent had a sweet undertone to it, and it was turning heavier and heavier as they scented. When Remus lowered his hand to James’s hip to pull him even closer, he understood what the scent meant.

James was hard against Remus, eagerly rolling his hips to grind into him. Remus’s own cock had been growing steadily harder, and he rubbed it against James’s thigh to find some relief from the insistent throbbing.

“Remus,” James gasped.

Remus wanted to hear James make more pretty noises, wanted to turn his scent even heavier, and he started guiding James towards the bed, their scent glands still firmly together. James was already panting, his hands wandering over the expanse of Remus’s back, and Remus pulled his head back only to then crash their lips together, licking into James’s pliable mouth.

James followed his every move with eagerness, and Remus pushed him onto the bed, following closely behind.

James smelled like sex, and Remus ground their hips together, gasping as he felt James's cock against his own. But they were separated by layers of clothing, and that wouldn't do.

Remus nearly tore James's fly open, and that's what snapped him back to reality. He was definitely being way too forceful, and no matter what James had said, he was probably not okay with how things were progressing. But just as Remus was about to pull back, James lifted his hand to Remus's scent gland and gave it a firm rub, shifting his hips towards Remus's hand.

"Yes," James hissed and closed his eyes. "That's so good."

Remus whimpered as James continued rubbing his gland, his pleasure spiking so hard that even he could smell it, his heavy scent mixing with James's, and suddenly he couldn't remember why he had wanted to stop.

"Remus," James breathed, and pulled Remus into a kiss with his free hand, the other one staying on Remus's scent gland.

Remus's hand found James's cock, and he rubbed it through his pants, James pushing into his touch. Remus wanted more—needed more—so he hurried to open his own fly to pull his cock out. When he pushed James's pants down on to expose his cock, the scent of arousal thickened, and after some fumbling, Remus took their cocks in his hand, giving them a stroke. His hand was too dry, so, in a feat he had never even attempted before, he used a wordless and wandless lubrication charm, and then gave their cocks a proper stroke.

"Ah, fuck," James gasped against Remus's mouth and pushed into Remus's hand.

Remus wanted James to feel good, wanted to make him moan again, and he stroked them fast, their cocks sliding together. They were both panting and moaning, and James was still rubbing Remus's scent gland, which drove him towards the edge very fast. He tried to hold on, but it didn't take much longer before he came with a cry.

He released his own cock and stroked James with more vigour. James had stopped rubbing his scent gland, and his hand was now merely resting over it, and Remus felt good, he felt cared for, and he hoped that James felt the same.

James came pretty soon after Remus, moaning and throwing his head back. Remus watched his face, his pink cheeks and the way his eyelids trembled, and he felt good, felt good about making James feel good. He had caused James pleasure, and it made him feel powerful in a good way.

They lay there, breathing together, and Remus started to feel self-conscious and worried. What if it had been too much for James? What if Remus had done something James didn't like, and he hadn't even stopped to make sure? What if James hated him now?

"Was," Remus asked quietly, "was that okay?"

“Okay? It was more than okay. It was amazing!”

Remus searched James’s face, but found nothing that would suggest James was insincere.

“I love it when you let your alpha out,” James said dreamily. “It’s so sexy.”

James’s scent rippled with what Remus was almost certain was arousal, and while James had told Remus that he liked it when Remus got assertive before, Remus was still surprised to find that James might have been telling the truth.

“You’re amazing,” James said.

Remus didn’t know what to say, so he leaned in to kiss James. James met his lips with a smile.

“Did you enjoy it?” he asked when Remus pulled back.

“Yes.”

Remus blushed as James gave him a brilliant smile.

Remus rolled off James and found his wand to clean up their mess. James waited until he had pulled his pants and trousers up again before pulling him closer. Remus snuggled up to him, feeling conflicted. There was a big part of him that felt as if he had done something forbidden because he hadn’t held back his instincts. There was another part of him that was thrilled to know that James still wanted him afterwards, that he hadn’t done anything to ruin their relationship. And then there was the part that was in utter disbelief at both what had happened and James telling him it was all fine.

Remus turned his head to press his nose into James’s scent gland. James’s scent was still thick, but otherwise calm, no longer the cloying stickiness it had been during sex. Remus wondered if it meant that James was happy.

It would take him so long before he would truly start to understand James’s scents.

“How has the lower dosage of suppressants been for you?” James asked. “It’s been more than a week now.”

“Didn’t I just demonstrate how it’s affected me?”

“That you can more easily be yourself?”

Remus shook his head.

“Tell me what you’re thinking,” James said.

Remus swallowed. “People don’t like assertive werewolves. Especially assertive alpha werewolves. If I can’t control myself better, I’m going to get in trouble.”

“Well, have you had difficulties controlling yourself?”

“I just did.”

“I meant any other times.”

The answer was no, but Remus didn’t think it proved anything. It hadn’t been long enough since he had lowered the dosage of his suppressants for any difficulties to arise.

“I think you’re worrying over nothing,” James said. “The fact that you got *assertive* with me doesn’t mean you’re going to act that way with everyone else. I think you’re still fully in control of yourself.”

Remus sighed quietly, unwilling to point out that he had just lost control of himself.

“I think you’ll be fine,” James said.

Remus didn’t want to argue, so he merely nodded and breathed in James’s scent.

They went quiet, James stroking Remus’s back with his warm hand, and Remus sniffing James’s scent gland. It was funny how bond scents worked, how they became the dominant scent but didn’t overpower the individual scents. James smelled as if he was Remus’s, but he also still smelled like James, Remus’s own scent subtly entangled with his.

Remus could get used to it, being a part of someone else like that.

“I don’t want to kill the mood,” James said, “but your dad wrote back to me. He has agreed to be there in the morning after the full moon.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Remus had been almost convinced Dad wouldn’t show up. Well, he still might not, but he had never lied to Remus about things like that. Remus would be very surprised if he didn’t come.

“How are you feeling about the full moon?” James asked.

“Better. Not as frightened.”

“That’s good. I’m sorry I needlessly stressed you out by lying. I should have been honest from the start.”

Remus nodded and rested his head on James’s shoulder.

“I hope it helps that you’ll have an actual Healer to help you,” James said. “Who would be better to take care of you after the full moon?”

Dad had been doing a good job of it. Dad was safe—even though the safety surrounding him had irreparably cracked the moment he told his new mate he had no son. But he was familiar, and familiarity meant safety on some fundamental level.

“Do you think the cellar will be difficult for you in wolf form?” James asked.

“The wolf will be fine. It’s used to cramped spaces.”

There was something sharp in Remus’s tone of voice, and James must have taken it to mean Remus didn’t want to discuss that subject any longer. James sighed and turned more towards Remus.

“Do you still want to go to the museum with me?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“When should we? Next weekend? I mean next week’s weekend. Obviously not the full moon weekend.”

“I don’t see why not.”

“Cool. We haven’t really gone out and done any actual dating. That was something we were supposed to do.”

“I guess so.”

James gave a pleased hum and pressed his nose into Remus’s hair.

“I want to date you,” he said sleepily.

“I want to date you too.”

Remus could smell the smile on James’s scent.

“Hey, Remus.”

“What?”

“Will you show me your sex toys sometime? I’m curious.”

Remus’s face went hot.

“I—maybe,” he said.

“Mm.”

And that was the last thing James said before he fell asleep. Remus could tell it from his scent, how it softened, as if it usually had edges that had suddenly vanished. Remus snuggled closer to him and closed his eyes. The full moon was looming in the very near future, but for now, he could push that thought away and relax in his mate’s company.

I have already written the next chapter, so it's only a matter of me having the time/energy to edit it. It will probably happen before this month is over, though.

I posted a couple of deleted scenes on tumblr. [Here's one](#) and [here's another one](#).

[tumblr](#) - [twitter](#) - [writing list](#) - [other social media](#)

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day preceding the full moon was tense. James couldn't calm down, and he spent his time deep-cleaning the flat. Once that was done and it was hardly even afternoon, he went to Sirius's only to discover that Sirius wasn't home. He stayed there to wait, wandering the hallways and pacing the sitting room until Sirius returned.

"Calm down," Sirius told him after he sprung up from his seat for the third time. "Remus is going to need you to be calm."

"But what if he needs—"

"James. I may not know him very well yet, but I'm confident in saying that he would hate for you to make a fuss. He knows what he's doing, and if he needs anything, he will ask you."

"But I need to be prepared."

"You're as prepared as you can be. There's nothing else you can do."

James grumbled, but he knew Sirius was right. He could only wait for Remus to arrive, and then Remus would tell him what needed to be done.

Remus finally arrived sometime after five. James practically ran to the door the moment the doorbell rang, and was met by a miserable-looking Remus. His face was pale, the bags under his eyes were dark, and he was shivering in spite of the warm weather.

"Hi," James said softly.

"Hello."

Remus came in and kicked off his shoes, but didn't take off his jacket. He was carrying a beat-up briefcase and smelled different, somehow earthier.

"I need to lie down," he mumbled.

"There's a guest room for you. Let me show you the way."

Sirius had come to greet Remus, and his friendly smile died, replaced by a worried frown, when he saw the state Remus was in. Remus coughed and wrapped his arms around himself as well as he could with the briefcase still in his hand.

"Let me carry that for you," James said and took the briefcase before Remus could react.

Remus tried to reach for it, but then gave up, merely following James upstairs, taking the stairs one at a time, holding on to the banister, and James still worried he was going to fall.

Once Remus was safely in bed, hidden under a thick blanket and shivering, James relaxed, but not by much.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” he asked.

“No,” came Remus’s faint answer. “If I don’t wake up before nine, wake me up.”

“Okay. You just rest now.”

James waited until Remus’s breathing had evened out before he tiptoed out of the room and went downstairs, where Sirius was sitting on the sofa, leafing through the paper.

“Is he okay?” Sirius asked, raising his head.

“He’s asleep.”

Sirius nodded gravely.

“Is that normal?” he asked.

“I think so? Remus let me borrow this book about werewolves that was written by an actual werewolf, and it said that before the full moon, werewolves feel ill, but I wasn’t expecting it to be that bad.”

“Could it be nerves?” Sirius asked. “Didn’t you say he has always transformed in the same place?”

“Yes... that could be it. I hope it doesn’t mean his night is going to be bad.”

“Let’s hope so.”

James sighed and looked at the time.

“I’m going to have to get Harry from the Weasleys soon,” he said.

“I can do that. You can stay here with Remus, and I’ll take care of Harry.”

“Thanks, but I think it will do me good to think about something other than Remus for a while. So, if you could stay here and make sure he’s okay, I’ll be back a bit later.”

Sirius nodded, and James left, taking the Floo straight to the Weasleys’. His mind couldn’t stop thinking about Remus, however, and he was distracted as he listened to Molly, who was talking about... something to do with the day. James had no idea.

Once Harry was safely at home, it had been nearly two hours since James had left, and he was itching to go back in case Remus needed him. He managed to turn his thoughts to Harry for long enough to listen to him talk about his day, but once Harry said he was going to continue building the town he had started building in the morning, James decided it was time for him to return to Remus.

“Harry,” he said. “Remus is ill, and I want to make sure he’s okay. I’m going to be gone until you’ve gone to bed, but Sirius will be here with you. Okay?”

“Fine,” Harry said distractedly, searching his pile of toys for something.

James went over to give him a kiss and a hug, and ruffle his hair, making him grumble, and then he left.

“Remus is still asleep,” Sirius said the moment James stepped out of the fireplace. “I checked.”

“Good. Harry’s waiting for you. He knows I’ll be gone all evening.”

Sirius nodded. “Kingsley should be home soon.”

“Okay. Don’t let Harry stay up too late. He needs to be in bed by the time I get back home.”

Sirius grinned mischievously and said nothing. James narrowed his eyes at him.

“You’re a bad influence on him,” James said, but couldn’t help laughing.

Sirius left, and James’s thoughts returned to Remus. He went upstairs and quietly cracked open the door to the guest bedroom, finding Remus fast asleep. He returned downstairs just as Kingsley came home.

“Hello,” Kingsley said. “Is Remus here already?”

“Yes, he’s sleeping. He looks really ill.”

“I wonder if there’s anything I could do to make him feel better. I don’t have experience with werewolves.”

James shrugged. “The book I read about werewolves said nothing about it. Maybe you can’t do anything to make it better.”

Kingsley hung up his cloak with a thoughtful frown.

“We could experiment,” he said. “Not this time, of course. He’s already going through a lot with transforming somewhere new and with new people around, but maybe later. Once he’s more used to the new arrangements.”

“That’s a good idea. Hopefully he’ll think so too.”

“Did you talk to him about the Wolfsbane, by the way?”

“Oh, yeah, I did. He didn’t want it. Although he did also say he’ll think about it.”

“Let’s hope he decides to take it. From what I’ve read, it helps significantly.”

James nodded and followed Kingsley into the study.

“Do you have an idea of what you’ll need to do in the morning?” James asked.

“Some. I’ve read a few reports, and based on those, I’m expecting to encounter broken bones and some bleeding.”

“Remus’s dad said he sometimes tears his tendons.”

Kingsley nodded. “That makes sense when you think about it. What else did he say?”

“Bleeding and broken bones. Those were the three main issues.”

“And does Remus have any potions he’s taking?”

“I think so? I don’t know if he’s brought anything with him or if he’s going to take them back home.”

Kingsley turned to look at James in surprise.

“Isn’t he going to stay here until he’s well?” he asked.

“I don’t know what he’s planned, to be honest. I just know that after the last full moon, he was already at home when I went to see him in the morning. He went straight back to sleep and slept for hours.”

“We’ll have to see what he says, I suppose.”

James was growing increasingly nervous the later it became. How did Remus usually prepare for the full moon? Did he merely sleep until it was time to transform? And how did he prepare for the morning after? Had he expected James to get him potions? Maybe James should have got some potions anyway, just to be prepared. Was he a bad mate for not having thought about it? It was already getting too late for him to go to the Apothecary.

Kingsley was good at calming the worst of James’s nerves just by being present. He had always had a calm demeanour, but James had never been as thankful about it as he was now that the clock was creeping closer to nine.

Right as James started thinking that he should wake Remus up, the stairs creaked, and soon, Remus appeared in the doorway, huddled in a blanket and carrying his briefcase.

“Hello, Remus,” Kingsley said. “How are you feeling?”

“The usual,” Remus said.

He walked over to the sideboard that stood close to the door to the cellar and opened his briefcase. He pulled out phial after phial of potions and organised them on the sideboard in a certain order.

“What are those for?” James asked, walking closer.

“For sore throat, migraine, nausea, ligaments, skin irritation, bowel irritation, muscles, and heart.” Remus took out a couple of more phials. “These are Pepper-Up and Skele-Gro. And a general healing potion.”

James looked at the collection of healing potions. Suddenly Remus’s lack of money for everything other than the healing potions made more sense.

“Do you have other potions at home?” James asked.

“The Essence of Dittany. And some salve for the bruising.”

Remus shivered and wrapped his arms around himself.

“Why didn’t you bring the Dittany with you?” James asked.

“I like doing it at home.”

Remus shivered again. James went to fetch another blanket from the sofa and wrapped it around his shoulders. Remus gave him a thankful smile, although it was missing the warmth Remus usually had. Kingsley joined them.

“Are these in a particular order?” he asked, gesturing at the potions.

“Yes. Don’t touch them.”

“We won’t. It seems that you know exactly what you’re doing.”

Remus shrugged and pulled the blankets more tightly around him.

“You should sit down,” James said and led Remus to the sofa.

Remus sat down, slumping against the backrest, and closed his eyes, his brow furrowed.

“Your dad will be there in the morning,” James said. “And Kingsley is good at healing, so you won’t have to worry about a thing. Everything will work out fine.”

He sat down next to Remus and pulled him against his shoulder. Remus leaned into him, and James wrapped his arms around him, hoping to provide more warmth. Remus let out a small noise of discomfort before he snuggled closer, and James closed his eyes as a desperate need to make everything okay swept over him.

“I have to go soon,” Remus muttered, but made no move to get up.

“You can stay here for a little while longer,” James said.

He opened his eyes and turned to look at Kingsley, who smiled at him when their eyes met. Kingsley was sitting in the armchair, watching Remus with a worried frown on his face. It must have been worse to see how Remus was faring when you were a Healer, who was used to fixing people when there was something wrong. James almost wanted to tell him to leave, both to make him feel better when he didn’t need to witness Remus’s condition and to make

sure Remus didn't feel uncomfortable with Kingsley around. He didn't think Remus had had enough time to get comfortable with Kingsley.

Remus gasped and groaned, his body twitching, and he pulled away from James's embrace.

"I have to go," he said.

He got up and started undressing, at which point Kingsley got up.

"I trust you two have everything in control," he said. "I'll head out. I'll see you in the morning, Remus."

"Hmm," Remus said, popping open the buttons of his shirt.

"Get me if you need anything," Kingsley said, but then he headed to the fireplace and left.

Once Remus was completely undressed, he was shivering, his teeth chattering. James tried to offer him the blanket, but he shook his head and headed to the cellar. James followed.

"You'll have to check that the protections work as they should," Remus said. "Make sure that they hold."

"I'm sure they'll be fine. You put them up yourself."

"You have to check."

"I will. Don't worry."

"And then you have to leave."

Remus stopped at the door to the cellar and turned to look at James.

"Promise me you will leave after you've checked the protections," he said.

"I promise. You have nothing to worry about."

Remus opened his mouth, but before he could say anything, he groaned and pressed his hand against his ribs.

"I'll see you in the morning," he said at the floor before looking up at James with the most vulnerable expression James had ever seen on his face.

"We'll see each other in the morning. I swear. And your dad will be there too."

Remus gave him one last searching look before turning around and stepping into the cellar. He looked at James once more before he pushed the door closed. The lock clicked, and the stairwell fell silent.

James swallowed and took a deep breath before raising his wand and checking the protections. They were all firmly in place, but he checked the locking charms twice, just in

case. As he did so, he noticed that there was a silencing charm on the door, and he wondered why. Without thinking, he lifted the silencing charm.

For a moment, the silence remained, but then he heard a scream through the door. It washed over him like a bucket of icy water, and his heart stuttered as he listened to Remus scream. He took a step back, the screams slowly morphed into broken howls, and then suddenly, it went silent.

James listened carefully, his heart hammering in his chest. Remus had said that the transformation hurt, but James hadn't realised how much it would hurt. He hadn't realised, even after Remus had told him his throat was sore in the morning because of the screaming, even after he had pointed out that one of the healing potions he took was for sore throat.

There was a loud thump against the door, and James stepped back with a gasp. There was a ferocious growl, and nails scratched against the wood of the door, and James realised that the only thing standing between him and a blood-thirsty werewolf was a single wooden door. He hastily cast a new silencing charm on the door before running up the stairs and closing the door at the top.

He stopped to breathe. He couldn't leave immediately because he was too shaken, his hand shaking and his breaths coming out loud. He didn't want Harry to see him like that in case he was still up. At the same time, he couldn't stop thinking about the fact that he had promised Remus he would leave immediately. He breathed deeply, big gulps of air, and eventually, he stopped shaking as hard.

James headed back home.

Sirius raised his head when James stepped out of the fireplace.

"Is Harry sleeping?" James asked.

"Yes. Kingsley went to sleep as well. I wanted to wait for you."

"Good."

James pushed his hand through his hair and slumped onto the sofa.

"What happened?" Sirius asked. "You look like you've seen the Grim."

James sighed and took off his glasses to wipe his eyes.

"I didn't realise," he said.

"Realise what?"

"That it hurts so much. He was screaming, Sirius. I've never heard anyone scream like that."

"Were you supposed to hear him scream? When I checked the protections, there was a silencing charm among them... Jim. Did you cancel the silencing charm?"

James pressed his hand over his eyes and groaned.

“I know I shouldn’t have,” he said. “But I did, okay, and I heard it all. And it’s horrible. How can he—how has he survived all these years when it hurts so much?”

James lowered his hand to look at Sirius’s blurry face.

“Does he have an option?” Sirius asked quietly.

James let out a broken sound. Sirius clasped his shoulder and squeezed.

“I heard the wolf,” James whispered. “It was right behind the door. *He* was. He’s Remus. Remus is the wolf.”

“Werewolves don’t remember being human when they are the wolf.”

“I know that. I meant that... that it’s Remus.”

“I don’t understand what you’re trying to say.”

James sighed and put his glasses on. He took a moment to think, a moment to collect his thoughts so that he himself understood what he was trying to say.

“I think that’s what Remus has been trying to tell me,” he finally said. “That he is a werewolf. He is both a human and a wolf. And I don’t think I really understood it until now. That he—that there’s that side of him that’s wild and uncontrollable. But he thought it would scare me away.”

“But it hasn’t?”

James shook his head. “He’s still Remus. He just has that side to him that’s trying to destroy him.”

“I’m still not sure I understand what you’re saying.”

“I’m just saying... I’m not sure what I’m saying.”

Sirius squeezed his shoulder again. James’s heart ached with the knowledge that his mate was in pain.

“You looked quite shaken when you arrived,” Sirius said.

“I have to be honest... I was scared. When the wolf rammed against the door, I was scared. But I’m not scared of Remus.” James sighed. “If only he agreed to take the Wolfsbane Potion. It would let him keep his human mind. It would be far less dangerous for him as well as others.”

“Let’s hope for the best.”

James nodded. He looked at the fireplace and thought about Remus trapped in a cramped room, the wolf trying to knock the door down to get out. How trapped he must have felt, how trapped in a dark place when he yearned to be free.

“I’ll check on Harry,” James said. “Then I’ll try to sleep.”

“Good. You can’t stay up all night worrying.”

“Watch me.”

Sirius gently swatted at his arm, and James smiled at him, a sorrowful twist of his lips.

James hardly slept a wink that night, tossing and turning as he couldn’t stop thinking about the wolf behind the door, the wolf that was Remus. He wondered what it felt like, to become something completely out of your control and then not remember anything about it the next morning.

James got up at four in the morning and made his way to the sitting room, where Kingsley was already waiting. Without a word, they took the Floo to Sirius and Kingsley’s, and sat down to wait. The closer it got to the moonset, the more James worried that Lyall wouldn’t show up at all, but he stepped out of the Floo at quarter past.

“Good morning,” he said gruffly.

“Good morning,” Kingsley said and got up to shake his hand. “Nice to meet you. I’m Kingsley.”

James couldn’t say anything, could hardly even hear what Kingsley and Lyall said, as he was watching the clock slowly inch forward.

“I brought Remus’s blanket,” Lyall said, lifting the ratty blanket he had in his arms. “It might soothe him to have something familiar with him.”

“That’s a good idea,” Kingsley said.

“I also think I should be the one to stop his bleeding,” Lyall said. “He will probably recognise my magic, and that will hopefully relax him.”

“That’s a good idea, too. Do you have a specific order in which you do things?”

James shut out the conversation and focused on the clock. He didn’t need a reminder that Remus was going to wake up hurt. He had been trying to prepare himself for it, but it had only made him worry, so he had decided it was better to push it out of his mind and then face it when it was time.

And the time arrived sooner than James would have wanted.

“It should be safe to go there now,” Lyall said, looking at his watch.

James got up without a word and led them to the stairwell. He let Lyall go first. Lyall stopped at the door, took a deep breath, and pushed the door open, only to then freeze.

“Oh Merlin,” he whispered.

Before James could ask, Lyall had stepped into the cellar, his wand already raised and a spell on his lips, and then James’s attention was drawn to the pool of blood Remus was lying in. It was big. It was way too big, and James turned to look at Remus in worry, but it didn’t help at all.

Remus was lying very still, pale as a sheet, and his arm twisted the wrong way around. There was a gaping wound on the side of his left thigh, although it seemed to have stopped bleeding. His hair was sticky with blood, the tips of his fingertips raw as if he had clawed the floor with them, and even though James watched very closely, it was hard to say if Remus was breathing at all.

“Move,” Kingsley said sharply, and when James didn’t immediately obey, he physically guided him out of the way.

James couldn’t look at Remus any longer, so he turned to look at Lyall, who had lowered his wand and was watching Kingsley with wide eyes. He had gone pale, obviously shaken by the state his son was in, which proved to James that Remus didn’t usually get hurt like that.

“Get the Dittany and the Blood-Replenishing Potion,” Kingsley said with an unfamiliar note of urgency in his voice.

James glanced at Lyall before hurrying up the stairs to fetch the potions, his heart hammering in his chest and something swirling and twirling in his stomach. The potions, luckily, were kept in the downstairs loo, so James was quick to return with the bottles.

Kingsley was hard at work, muttering spell after spell, and much to James’s relief, Remus let out a rattling cough. As James watched, Lyall raised his wand and cleaned up the blood, which made the scene seem far less gruesome. It didn’t much comfort James, however, because now that the metallic tang of blood was gone, he could smell Remus, and Remus smelled... unwell.

“Give me the Dittany,” Kingsley said and held out his hand without turning to look at James, who handed it over.

James couldn’t even begin to describe how Remus smelled unwell, it was almost as if he wasn’t smelling it at all, but feeling it, his heart in his throat as he was filled with the knowledge that his mate was hardly alive, and he couldn’t even look at him, he couldn’t look at his mate because he was too weak, he wasn’t enough for Remus, who needed someone who could stay strong while he was wounded, and James wasn’t that person. He wouldn’t have even known where to start healing Remus, he wouldn’t have known, and then Remus would have died while he watched and—

A heavy hand clasped James’s shoulder, snapping James out of his spiral and into the present. He turned to look at Lyall, who was looking at him with understanding.

“He’ll pull through,” Lyall said. “He always has.”

James wanted to argue because the fact that Remus had always survived before didn’t mean he was definitely going to survive now, but before he could open his mouth, Lyall squeezed his shoulder, bordering on too hard.

“I understand,” he said. “I have seen it for the first time, too.”

James’s lower lip wobbled, and he bit his lips together to keep Lyall from seeing. Lyall took the Blood-Replenishing Potion from him to hand it to Kingsley, who had turned to ask for it.

“You were shocked to see him,” James whispered. “Just now.”

Lyall hesitated before he said, “It hasn’t been this bad since the first few times.”

The first few times implied that Remus was going to be as bad a few more times, and James really didn’t know how he would handle that.

“You can talk to me if you need to,” Lyall said.

James nodded, although he didn’t think he was going to talk to Lyall about anything. He might have been looking after Remus for twenty-five years, but he had also chosen to leave Remus without his further help.

James gulped and turned to look at Kingsley, who was bent over Remus, wand still in hand, but still for the moment. James braved a glance at Remus, whose brow was furrowed and breaths uneven gasps. As James turned to look at Kingsley, Kingsley waved his wand again, and Remus started breathing easily. Kingsley straightened up.

“We should get him to bed,” he said.

“Remus will want to walk out of here on his own,” Lyall said.

Kingsley turned to look at Lyall with such a ferocious glare that James hadn’t known he even had it in him.

“I can’t leave him lying on the floor—” he started.

“He will be upset if you move him,” Lyall interrupted. “Believe me. Once he got older, he no longer found comfort in being moved around while he’s unconscious.”

Kingsley squeezed his wand so tightly that James worried it might snap in half.

“I’m a Healer,” he said. “It’s my job to heal him.”

“And you have,” Lyall said. “Let him wake up by himself, and then, if he’s too weak to get up on his own, you can help him. But not before.”

James was honestly a bit surprised by how adamant Lyall was about Kingsley doing what would make Remus comfortable. Apparently, he still cared about Remus’s comfort, even

though he had chosen to abandon him.

Kingsley shook his head but sighed and stepped away from Remus. Lyall stepped closer to cover Remus with the blanket that, on a closer look, had a bloodstain on it. James would have to get Remus a nicer blanket. The moment the blanket covered Remus, the furrow of his brown smoothed out, and he seemed to relax. James wondered if it was because he was no longer cold or because he recognised the blanket. James would have to find out before he did something drastic, such as getting rid of it.

“We should go upstairs,” Lyall said. “He doesn’t like it when people watch him sleep.”

“He’s unconscious,” Kingsley snapped. “That’s different from sleeping.”

Lyall said nothing, merely looked at him. James was shocked by the level of Kingsley’s exasperation; he always seemed so calm.

“I’ll stay here,” James said. “You two should go.”

Kingsley opened his mouth, undoubtedly to protest, but James frowned at him.

“If something happens, I’ll call you back here,” James said. “But if it makes Remus uncomfortable to have people around while he’s unconscious, we should respect that.”

“You should come up too,” Lyall said.

“No. I’m his mate. He will understand why I stayed here with him.”

Lyall looked as if he wanted to argue, but then he sighed and headed out of the room. With one last glance at Remus, Kingsley followed. James didn’t want to hover over Remus, so after he had given Remus’s back one stroke, he went to sit on the stairs.

He sighed. He could hear voices coming from upstairs, and he wondered if Kingsley was arguing with Lyall about how wise it was to leave Remus unattended after he had been so badly hurt. James wondered how Lyall had done it. James was almost certain that Remus would have stopped wanting to be moved around when he was a teenager, which meant that Lyall had been moving him from the shed to his bed for around a decade. How had he stopped doing it? How had he been able to just stop?

Remus smelled warm, but in the wrong way, the way fresh blood was warm and not the way sunshine was. Remus was so pale, his skin almost translucent with how starkly visible his veins were on his eyelids and under his eyes. It wasn’t normal.

But that still didn’t mean it was dangerous, either.

If only James knew more about healing. If only he knew how to heal people.

And that’s when an idea started forming in his head.

Kingsley had known what to do to help Remus because he was a Healer. Healers knew what to do when they were faced with someone who was hurt. A Healer had known exactly how to

help Remus.

Should James become a Healer?

It might be cool to be able to help people other than Remus, too. Hadn't James become an Auror to help people? What would be more helpful than healing them?

Remus twitched, but didn't wake up. His right arm was uncovered, and James could see an angry scar extending from his elbow towards his shoulder. James hadn't noticed a wound there, but he hadn't really been looking, had he. He had been unable to look for long enough to take note of everything that had been wrong with Remus.

Lyall had been shocked to see Remus like that. It was a comforting thought in the sense that it meant Remus didn't usually hurt himself as badly. Maybe next month, it would be better.

But it might not be. Maybe Remus's wolf form disliked the cellar for reasons other than its novelty.

Or maybe James had caused it.

James swallowed heavily.

He hadn't left immediately, as he had promised. He hadn't left because he had been too curious for his own good, and Remus had smelled him through the door. What injuries had that caused? Which of Remus's injuries were directly James's fault?

Remus would never forgive him.

James would never forgive himself, either.

James swallowed again and blinked his eyes. He had been so stupid. So, so stupid.

Why did it feel as if he could only make mistakes when it came to Remus's safety?

James looked at Remus's still figure on the floor. He felt a bit sick, thinking about Remus's pain. His mate was in distress, and there was nothing he could do about it, and that knowledge weighed heavy in his heart.

James didn't know how long it took before Remus stirred. James sat perfectly still, holding his breath as he watched Remus slowly gain consciousness, his fingers twitching against the cold cement floor. Remus groaned, and the protective alpha in James was screaming for him to go to help, but he sat resolutely still, respecting Remus's wishes of waking up alone as much as he could while still being present.

Remus started pushing himself up, first to his knees, and then to his feet, his legs wobbly as he wrapped the blanket tightly around himself. It was only as he took his first step towards the door that he seemed to notice James.

"Hello," James said. "I hope you don't mind that I stayed with you."

Remus looked baffled, as if he hadn't quite understood what James had just said. James stood up slowly. Remus's eyes followed his every movement, but there was something missing from them, a spark of warmth they usually held.

"Do you want to go upstairs?" James asked, when Remus said nothing.

Remus nodded shortly before heading to the stairs. He tripped on the first step, and James caught him, not letting go of him afterwards.

"Let me help you," he said.

He expected Remus to argue, but he didn't, merely started up the stairs, slowly and shakily, leaning mostly on the balustrade but not shying away from James's support either.

When they got to the top of the staircase, they stopped, Remus out of breath and now leaning on James.

"Take your time," James murmured. "There's no rush."

Once Remus had caught his breath, they walked to the sideboard, and Remus drank the potions in the order he had placed them, finishing with a glass of water someone had brought there. James had forgotten all about Remus needing a glass of water.

James peeked into the sitting room and found Kingsley sitting on the sofa, staring at Remus with a concerned expression, while Lyall was nowhere to be seen.

He must have left the first chance he got. James scoffed.

"What do you want to do next?" James asked when Remus placed the glass on the sideboard. "Do you just go to bed?"

"Dittany..." Remus's voice was frail.

"You don't need Dittany. Kingsley already healed your wounds while he was tending to the big one on your thigh."

Remus frowned and looked down at himself, even though his body was covered by the blanket.

"I hope that's okay," James said. "It wouldn't have made any sense for him not to heal them all while he was already at it."

Remus took a while, breathing heavily, before he nodded.

"Do you want to go to bed?" James asked.

"My clothes..."

"Do you need to get dressed first? But you're just going to go to bed next."

Remus closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening them again.

“I’m a bit,” he said, words slurring slightly. “It’s confusing. I’m not—am I going home?”

“Not yet. You can sleep here. Gather some strength.”

“Oh.”

“Would you prefer to go home?”

Remus blinked heavily and shook his head slightly, but James didn’t think that was an answer. He waited.

“Is it okay for me to sleep here?” Remus finally asked.

“Yes. I thought that was clear to you. The guestroom is waiting for you.”

“Oh. I don’t need to—I don’t need to Apparate?”

“You don’t need to Apparate before you’re ready.”

Something in Remus relaxed, and James held him more tightly to make sure he didn’t topple over.

“Let’s head to bed, shall we?” James suggested.

Remus turned towards the stairs, and James followed him. The trip upstairs was slow, as Remus’s feet seemed to weigh heavy, but they finally made it to the guestroom, and James helped Remus into bed, covering him with the duvet and folding the old blanket away. There was movement in the doorway, and much to James’s surprise, it was Lyall.

“Remus,” Lyall said and came over to the bed. “I have to leave for work. I wanted to let you know.”

“Mm,” Remus muttered, his eyes closed.

“You survived another month,” Lyall whispered.

“I did.”

Lyall patted Remus’s shoulder.

“Would you like me to be there next full moon?” he asked.

Remus took a moment before he managed to say, “Yes.”

“Then I will be. But you’re in good hands here. You have nothing to worry about.”

Remus didn’t respond. James wasn’t sure he was even awake at that point.

“I’ll see you then at the latest,” Lyall said. “Remember that you can write to me if you need anything.”

Remus gave a small nod. Lyall patted his shoulder again, then turned to James.

“Thank you for taking such good care of him,” he said.

James blinked in surprise.

“I’ll see you later,” Lyall said and left without waiting for a response.

James looked after him without knowing what to think. Then he turned to look at Remus, who was breathing heavily, his mouth open and eyes tightly closed.

“Remus?”

There was no reaction.

“I’ll be downstairs if you need me,” James said.

Remus didn’t react, and there wasn’t much James could do other than leave. He went downstairs before he realised he was still carrying the blanket. It really was old and ratty, and James sincerely hoped that Remus wasn’t very attached to it so that he could replace it with something nicer.

“How’s he doing?” Kingsley asked.

“He’s asleep. He seemed okay, just tired.”

“I would be surprised if he weren’t after all that.”

“Yeah...”

James placed the blanket on the armchair and sat down next to Kingsley on the sofa.

“Now we wait,” he said.

“I don’t like that I wasn’t allowed to watch him until he woke up.”

“I understand why that might be difficult for you, but... Did you know that Remus has been a werewolf since he was four years old?”

Kingsley looked horrified.

“His father has been looking after him ever since then,” James said. “That’s twenty-five years of full moons. I think we can trust him and that what he says is the right thing to do.”

James hoped that Kingsley didn’t notice the note of bitterness in James’s voice. As much as James genuinely thought that Lyall knew exactly how to treat Remus after the full moon, that didn’t erase the resentment he felt for Lyall choosing to abandon Remus the moment it became possible.

Although that wasn't completely fair since he had shown up for this full moon and had even asked Remus if he wanted him there for the next one, but James was almost certain there was a limit to how many more times he was willing to show up.

What if Remus would have still wanted him there after he decided it was enough? Would he really abandon Remus?

James hoped they would never need to find out.

"He was surprised by how bad it was," Kingsley said.

"Yeah, he said it hasn't been that bad since the first few times."

"So, you think he has seen it that bad before? Because can we really trust his judgement if Remus is more hurt than he usually is?"

James didn't know what to say to that. He sighed.

"I'm glad you were there to help," he said. "Even if I knew healing, I don't know if I could have handled that by myself."

"It's not easy to see your mate hurt."

James laughed darkly.

"It isn't," he said. "I feel a bit sick even thinking about it."

"But he's okay now. He'll be okay."

"Yeah."

They went quiet. James wanted to go back upstairs to make sure Remus really was okay, but he didn't want to intrude. James hadn't asked, but he was almost certain that Remus usually went home after the transformation to sleep in his own bed by himself, and while James wanted to support him, he didn't want to make him uncomfortable.

Not that Remus would know he was there, since he was asleep.

"Should I check on Harry?" James asked out loud.

"He's fine with Sirius, I'm sure. But you could if you wanted to. I'll be here in case Remus needs something."

James bit his lip. He looked towards the stairs before looking towards the fireplace, his need to check on his mate warring with his need to see that his son was all right.

"Go," Kingsley said. "Remus is safe here. You obviously need to see Harry right now."

"Yes..."

After seeing Remus so badly wounded that morning and then finding out that a four-year-old Remus had been equally badly wounded, he couldn't help feeling the need to make sure his son was okay.

"I'll be back soon," he said and got up.

He caught a glimpse of the blanket in the chair.

"I guess I'll take this with me and keep it for the next full moon," he said and grabbed the blanket.

"It's seen better days."

"I'll have to ask Remus how much he wants to keep it. Hopefully he will let me get him a new one."

With that, James strode to the fireplace and went home.

James had forgotten how early in the morning it was, so Harry was still asleep when he returned home. He did have time to see Harry once he woke up and before he returned to Sirius and Kingsley's around midday.

"Remus is still asleep," Kingsley said from the sofa. "I just checked a moment ago."

"Good. I think I'm going upstairs with him."

Kingsley nodded and turned the page of the Daily Prophet he had been reading.

James went up to the guest room and sat down in a chair, watching Remus sleep. James wished he could join Remus in bed and cuddle him, but he hadn't thought to ask beforehand if Remus might like it, and he didn't want to do it without asking in case Remus didn't want to be cuddled right after the full moon.

It took quite some time before Remus finally stirred and turned to lie on his side before he slowly opened his eyes.

"Good morning," James said softly. "How are you feeling?"

Remus groaned and turned to lie on his stomach.

"Do you need anything?" James asked.

"You wouldn't happen to have any kind of pain potion, would you?"

"I'm sure Kingsley has some somewhere. I'll go and ask. Do you need anything else?"

Remus shook his head, his face hidden in the pillow.

"I'll be right back," James said.

He went to ask Kingsley which healing potion he recommended, then fetched the bottle and returned to Remus, who raised his upper body enough to take the potion before slumping onto the bed again. James placed the bottle on the nightstand and looked at Remus with a fond smile.

“Do you want to cuddle?” he asked.

Remus nodded, so James climbed into bed with him and pulled him closer, his back against James’s chest. Remus sighed in content and relaxed. He fell asleep again, and James held him, feeling very protective of his mate, who was unwell. He was a bit surprised he had managed to spend any time away from Remus, but, he supposed, his instincts as a father overdrove his instincts as a mate.

Remus didn’t sleep for very long before he woke up. He stirred quietly, then turned around to hide his face in the crook of James’s neck. He smelled better than before, more tired than hurt, and James hugged him closer.

“I want to go home,” Remus mumbled.

“Then you should. I’ll come with you.”

Remus breathed out, almost as if he had been about to say something, but he remained quiet. They stayed like that for a while longer before Remus pulled away and sat up. He stretched gingerly, and turned to look at his own body, still nude and his new scars on display. Remus looked at the one on his arm in interest and barely spared a glance at the big one on his thigh.

Remus looked around the room and spotted the mirror next to the wardrobe. He walked over to it and turned his body so that he could see his thigh. He took a long time looking at the scar, his brow furrowed and lips bitten together, brushing the scar with a finger before turning away from the mirror. James had brought his clothes into the bedroom while Remus had been sleeping, and Remus got dressed without a word, wincing when he pulled his jumper over his head.

“Does it hurt?” James asked.

“A bit. But it’s nothing out of the ordinary.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s okay for you to be in pain. You should take some more pain potion.”

“I’ll take some at home.”

James thought it was not worth it to argue with Remus about it, so they headed downstairs, where Kingsley was cooking lunch.

“Do you want to stay for lunch?” Kingsley asked when they stepped into the kitchen.

“No, thank you,” Remus said quietly. “I just want to go home.”

“All right. Do you need anything before you go? Do you want me to check you over?”

Remus shook his head. "I'm okay."

Kingsley looked at him from head to toe with a concerned tilt to his lips, but then nodded.

"Let me know if there's anything else I can do," he said.

Remus nodded. He took out his wand.

"Can I Disapparate from here or do I need to go outside?" he asked.

"You can Disapparate from here," Kingsley said.

"Okay." Remus hesitated. "Thank you. For letting me transform here and taking care of me."

"It was my pleasure."

Remus gave Kingsley a faint smile before he turned to James and reached a hand out to him.

"I'll Side-Along you," he said.

James was surprised by this turn of events, but it made sense for Remus to Side-Along him, because he didn't actually know where Remus's Apparition point was. He gripped Remus's arm as tightly as he dared, Remus pivoted on his heel, and they Apparated straight into his flat. James blinked in surprise.

"I'm allowed to Apparate here after the full moon," Remus said, voice awfully quiet.

He must have been tired.

"Do you need anything?" James asked.

"No. Well, a pain potion, but I'll get it in a minute."

Remus changed into his pyjamas before he went over to the kitchen cabinet where he kept his potions and picked out a bottle. He used a spoon again, and James wondered if the potion was so strong that he didn't need more than a spoonful or if he was being conscious of how expensive it would be to replace it.

"Are you going to eat?" James asked.

"Not yet. I'll have to wait before I feel better."

Remus headed to bed, and James followed.

"Do you want to cuddle?" James asked.

"Yes, please."

Remus didn't look at James as he said it, and there was something resembling embarrassment in his scent, but rather than try to figure it out, James climbed into bed and pulled Remus against his side.

They were quiet for a long time, but Remus didn't seem to be falling asleep. There was something churning in his scent, right below the surface, and James waited to find out what it was.

"Was it okay?" Remus finally whispered. "You're still here."

"This morning, you mean? It was..."

James didn't want to lie, but he also wasn't sure what to say so as not to make Remus feel as if he was about to run away.

"I'm glad Kingsley was there," James said.

"Was it bad?"

James swallowed. "Your dad was shocked."

"Oh..."

Remus shifted, as if he were about to pull away, and James turned more towards him, pulling him closer.

"He said you're not usually that hurt," James said.

"I understand if it's too much."

"That's not what I'm trying to say. I'm not leaving you, Remus. I'm glad you had Kingsley there to help you. I'm glad I could help even a little bit."

Remus said nothing. His scent was churning in apprehension, and James held him tightly to communicate to him that he was really going nowhere.

"Are you sure?" Remus then asked. "That you... Are you sure you can keep doing it?"

"Helping you after the full moon? Of course. I'm going to keep practising with Kingsley, and eventually, I'll be able to help you even more."

"And you... want to do that?"

"Yes." James pulled his head back to look Remus in the eyes. "Of course."

Remus searched his face for something before looking away again and burrowing closer to him.

"I think I'm ready to meet Harry soon," he said.

It was a complete surprise. James hadn't even thought about when Remus and Harry would meet, but even if he had, he would have been under the impression that Remus still needed time before he felt ready.

"If you're really not going to leave," Remus mumbled. "I should meet him."

“Yes, of course. Anytime you wish.”

“The weekend two weeks from now? Maybe?”

“Yes, that works. I can come up with something we could do together, so that we’re not just sitting inside. It might be easier on you if Harry had something to distract him from you.”

Remus nodded and hugged James tightly.

“How nervous are you about meeting him?” James asked.

“Very. What if he hates me?”

“I don’t think he will hate you. He might be apprehensive at first, but he won’t hate you.”

“Hmm.”

Remus’s scent was starting to thicken with something warm; he was getting tired. James stroked his back with slow rubs, and Remus grew more and more relaxed until he finally fell asleep.

As hard as that morning had been, James still felt mainly positive; he had now seen Remus right after the full moon, and while it had been horrible, it hadn’t driven him away, as he had secretly worried it would. If anything, it had made him more determined to learn how to help, to support Remus as best as he could. He would be more effective with his house-hunting too, to make sure that Remus would eventually have somewhere nicer to transform. Maybe more space would be better.

James was looking forward to Remus and Harry finally meeting each other. He knew that Harry was sometimes cautious with new people, but he hoped it wouldn’t discourage Remus, as he was certain that, with a bit of time, Harry would absolutely love Remus. It remained to be seen how long it would take before they would tell Harry about Remus’s lycanthropy, how long until Remus was comfortable sharing that information, but James was sure the right moment would come.

Remus shifted in his sleep, and James smiled. He was looking forward to getting to know Remus better and going out on dates, he was looking forward to moving in with him and building their little family together. He was sure that the full moons would get easier, that Remus’s shyness would abate with enough time, and that in the end, they would remain mates.

James was thankful that he had decided to pop by the Registry to ask about whether he needed a new mate. Meeting Remus had given his life a new direction, and he was eager to see where this new path was leading him.

To a happy future, he hoped.

One little chapter left!

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Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Remus woke up hungry, but he was also warm and comfortable, so he was reluctant to move. James smelled familiar and safe, and Remus snuggled closer in the hopes that his hunger would let him rest for a while longer.

“Did you sleep well?” James asked.

Remus grunted in answer, unwilling to open his mouth yet. He pressed his face into James’s armpit to hide from the sunlight—which had the advantage of putting his nose closer to James’s scent. James’s scent went warm, and he moved his arm to press his palm against Remus’s back, stroking slowly. Remus had never imagined he could feel so at peace with someone.

There were many other things Remus hadn’t imagined either, such as having a mate in the first place. He had been so certain he was destined to loneliness, that there would be nothing the Alpha Mating Registry could do to pair him with someone, yet here he was, in the arms of a man who wanted to be with him even after seeing what the full moon was like.

The full moon... James had said Dad had been shocked in the morning, which meant that something very bad must have happened during the night. Remus’s body was unusually sore, but he hadn’t thought it might mean that the night had been much worse than usual. What would have needed to happen to him to shock Dad? How had James been okay with seeing it?

“What was it like?” Remus asked, not raising his head. “What happened to me?”

James took in a sharp breath and didn’t immediately respond. Remus was filled with worry. Had he misunderstood? Maybe James had been scared off by what he had seen, and merely had the decency not to leave Remus while he was still unwell.

“You were in a bad shape,” James finally said, voice hoarse. “There was a lot of blood. You had torn the side of your thigh to pieces. Your arm was broken, and Kingsley said you had broken a couple of ribs, too. Then there was that bite on your arm. Kingsley also mentioned a torn rotator cuff, but I didn’t really ask for a detailed list of what was wrong. But it was bad.”

Remus didn’t know what to say. It didn’t sound all that much worse than usual, so he didn’t understand what might have shocked Dad so much. Had it looked worse than it sounded? Had there been an unusual amount of blood?

He had torn his thigh *to pieces*. What did that mean? The scar was bigger than his usual scars, but otherwise didn’t look any different. But maybe the damage had been worse before it had healed. Kingsley was a Healer, so he was bound to know how to minimise the damage.

“It’s not always that bad,” Remus felt the need to say.

“I sincerely hope not. You deserve better.”

Did Remus deserve better, though? He didn’t think so, but his friends had disagreed, hadn’t they?

“My friends think I should accept the Wolfsbane,” he said.

“And what do you think?”

Remus hadn’t expected James to ask, and he didn’t immediately know what to say.

“What’s going through your head right now?” James asked.

“I don’t deserve it,” Remus whispered.

“Why do you think so?”

“Because... because...”

Remus went quiet for a long time, trying to come up with the words that would explain how he felt and thought about himself. He wasn’t sure how he could word it so that James would understand.

“I’m not worth it,” he finally said. “It’s a lot of money to spend on someone like me.”

“Someone like you?”

“Someone so... broken.”

Remus hid his face even more firmly in James’s armpit. James allowed it, and it made Remus feel better.

“If you are broken,” James said, “doesn’t that just mean that you need more help?”

“But I don’t deserve it.”

“Remus... you deserve so much. You deserve good things. You deserve help. And I’m going to keep repeating that until you start believing me.”

Remus frowned. James smelled sincere, but because Remus couldn’t trust his ability to tell what James was thinking and feeling from his scent alone, he, after a moment’s hesitation, raised his head to see James’s expression. His expression seemed sincere as well.

“I really care about you,” James said. “I like you so much.”

Remus wanted to ask him why, wanted to ask him to explain because there was no reason for anyone to like and care about Remus, but he stopped himself.

Shouldn't James's word be enough? Shouldn't Remus simply accept that James felt what he said he felt? Why would he lie about it?

Then something in James's expression changed, and it was reflected in his scent as well.

"I have to apologise to you," James said, and his voice was grave.

"Why?" Remus asked in trepidation, almost unwilling to hear whatever James was about to tell him.

Had James been lying to him about something again?

"I'm really sorry," James said, "but I didn't leave immediately after checking that the protections were okay."

Remus wasn't sure what James was trying to tell him. Had he spent the night in the same house with Remus, while Remus was out of his mind with bloodlust? He had told James he didn't want anyone to stay in the same house while he was the wolf.

"I noticed there was a silencing charm," James said. "And I was confused by it, so, without thinking, I cancelled it."

A cold wave travelled through Remus. What had James heard? He had heard the wolf, the angry snarls of a beast, and now he hated Remus and had merely waited for the right moment to tell him so.

"I heard you scream," James said quietly, and his eyes were suddenly shiny with tears.

James had never teared up before. Remus didn't know what he was supposed to do. James had comforted him when he had cried, but would he know how to do that for James?

"You were in so much pain," James said, and his voice broke. "And there was nothing I could do to help you. I felt so useless, just standing there while you were suffering on the other side of the door."

Remus watched in horror as a tear escaped James's eye and made its way down his cheek. He had to do something, but he didn't know what that something was.

James wiped the tear away with a wet laugh.

"And then it went quiet," he said. "Until..."

Until the wolf had made itself known, and now James was trying to tell Remus that he had found it disgusting, Remus was disgusting, and—

"The wolf slammed against the door," James said. "I think maybe that's why you broke your ribs. It was... so loud."

Remus was confused. Why was James telling him that? Couldn't he just say what he was thinking and put Remus out of his misery?

James sniffled and blinked his eyes, another tear making its way down his face.

“Was it my fault?” he asked quietly. “Did the wolf smell me? Is it my fault you were so hurt in the morning?”

Remus blinked in surprise. He watched the tear making its way down James’s soft skin and raised his hand to wipe it away. James gave him a watery smile.

“There is a spell on the door preventing the wolf from smelling anything that’s on the other side,” Remus said. “It couldn’t have smelled you. It was not your fault.”

James searched Remus’s face, as if he didn’t believe what Remus told him.

“It was not your fault,” Remus repeated. “The wolf is like that. That’s what it always does. It doesn’t like being cooped up when it yearns to run free.”

James squeezed his eyes shut and sighed before opening them again.

“I was so worried I caused it,” he said. “I would have never forgiven myself. Especially because you told me to leave, and I didn’t.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I’m sorry. I was just... curious, I guess. I didn’t understand... I left after that, though. I wasn’t there the whole night.”

Something in Remus relaxed at that knowledge.

“Will you forgive me?” James asked.

“Yes. I forgive you.”

James smiled. His eyelashes were wet, but his eyes were no longer teary.

“Well,” he said. “What do you say about the Wolfsbane? You would be in control of the wolf. You would be far less hurt in the morning.”

Remus bit his lip. He wanted to keep saying no because he truly did not deserve to have someone spend their money on him like that, especially because it was to treat the lycanthropy. He didn’t deserve it, but it was tempting, thinking about not being in so much pain in the morning.

“I could give it a try,” he said.

James’s face was taken over by a brilliant smile.

“Really?” he asked. “I’m so happy to hear that. Oh, I’m sure the next full moon is going to be much easier for you.”

Remus wasn't so sure, even though his friends had said it made a huge difference. He simply wouldn't believe it until he witnessed it with his own two eyes.

And if it turned out not to help him much at all, he could ask James not to buy it for him any longer. That way, it wouldn't be a waste of money.

"I'm hungry," Remus said to derail the conversation.

He was done talking about being a werewolf.

"I'll cook for you," James immediately said.

"I have food in the fridge."

"Then I'll heat it up for you."

And with that, James got up from the bed and headed to the fridge with determination. Remus watched him and wondered what he had done so right to deserve a mate like James.

When Remus had gone to the Alpha Mating Registry, he could have never imagined that he would end up leaving with a mate, who had grown to care about him so much in such a short amount of time. And he cared about James, too.

Remus found a ripple of excitement in him as he thought about continuing his life with James. They would get to know each other better, and if they were lucky, it would lead to a strong relationship. If Remus were lucky, it would turn out that James was just as wonderful as he had seemed so far. Maybe it would also turn out that Harry liked Remus, too. A part of Remus regretted agreeing to meet him so soon, but maybe it would turn out fine.

As Remus watched James peer into the fridge, he wondered if he would ever believe James when he said that Remus was worth something. Was that something that would happen over time? Could Remus live his life differently—believing that he was deserving of kindness?

He was almost certain that James would help him figure it out. Maybe he could trust James when he said that he wanted to stay with him.

Maybe Remus deserved it.

Chapter End Notes

We have reached the end. I'm honestly sad about it, because I think the world of this fic still has so many things I could explore, but if I do that, I think it would be very easy to just drift off pointlessly. This fic was supposed to be the story of how Remus and James became mates, and this is how that story ends.

I started writing this fic on 30 March 2021, and the only reason I know that is that I tweeted about stupidly choosing to work on something that requires me to write a formal letter. I actually can't believe it's been so long. When I started writing this, I didn't have a guess on how long this fic would be, but 100k would still have been my last guess. This is the longest thing I've ever written (at least I'm pretty sure my sci-fi lesbian love story didn't go this much over 100k) and it's been frustrating at times, but also a lot of fun.

I was never expecting a wolfbucks fic to get this many readers. I'm really grateful to everyone who has been reading along, and I'm especially thankful to everyone who has left comments and been so supportive when I had to take breaks from working on this. Thank you so much for being here and loving this fic!

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